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Critical Hermeneutics

Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives in
Turkey on the Understanding and Interpretation
of The Qur'an

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Abstract of Thesis

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Title of thesis:	<i>Critical Hermeneutics: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives in Turkey on the Understanding and Interpretation of the Qur'an</i>		

From the moment of its revelation, the Qur'an has held a pivotal importance for Muslims. However, reverence for the Qur'an did not by default mean an indiscriminate application of its message. On the contrary, as old as the Qur'an is, there is also an equally old tradition of hermeneutics that ponders upon the operations and conditions in which the meanings of the Qur'an become intelligible and significant for different contexts. In this dissertation I have explored the hermeneutical theories of three Turkish thinkers by asking the following question: *what is the status of new and variant interpretations of the Qur'an in contemporary Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics as exemplified by the works of Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Öztürk?* Accordingly, I have discovered that new and different interpretations of the Qur'an are only meaningful and justified if they fulfil the right subjective and objective requirements an interpreter must impose on him or herself as a subject. On the objective side these requirements include the following of a formal method and understanding of the historical use of Arabic. However, on the subjective side, other requirements are stipulated, such as faith, conscience, and self-knowledge. By integrating subjectivity in interpretation, the Turkish authors

open a constructive theoretical path to new readings of the Qur'an that are informed by the subject's relative context. However, despite reaching new thresholds of interpretation, the Turkish authors have chosen to defer the full potential of their hermeneutics to the prudence of future interpreters, rather than having chosen to explicate these themselves.



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Lay Summary of Thesis

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For Muslims the Qur'an symbolizes God's final will unto humankind. Accordingly, great attention is devoted to implementing the message of the Qur'an to everyday life. However, as reverent as Muslims might be, they are not hastily applying themselves to the message of the Qur'an without any forethought. As old as revelation itself, Muslims also have a tradition that ponders upon the right conditions in which they can understand the message of the Qur'an. This tradition is better known as Qur'an hermeneutics.

In this dissertation I have explored three Turkish thinkers that have dedicated their works towards a better understanding of the Qur'an. I have explored their works in light of the following question: *what is the status of new and variant interpretations of the Qur'an in contemporary Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics as exemplified by the works of Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Öztürk?* In other words, I have inquired into the particular appreciation that Turkish thinkers have or do not have for new ways in which the Qur'an is read.

Whilst trying to answer this question, I have discovered that the Turkish authors only constructively appreciate new readings when they fulfil certain personal and impersonal requirements that an interpreter must oblige by. All three authors require that interpreters, regardless of who they are as a person, must interpret the Qur'an in accordance with rules and practical use of Arabic during the 6th and 7th century. However, two authors (Alpyağıl and Öztürk), have also required the interpreter to personally have faith, humility, and moral scruples.

By allowing for interpreters to also consider their personal situations, these Turkish authors have paved the way for new readings of the Qur'an that are context sensitive. Nevertheless, despite creating a field for new interpretations, these Turkish authors do not fully explore the limitations and possibilities of this field. They would rather defer judgment on what one can or cannot reinterpret to the prudence of future interpreters, than explicitly work these out themselves.

Notes on citations

All principal references to the Qur'an have been made from Yusuf Ali's English translation. Except for cases where a theoretical point is made clearer with other English translations of the Qur'an. In such cases other Qur'an translations are explicitly cited.

All references to Islamic concepts by the Turkish thinkers have principally been left in their native Turkish and Latinised form (e.g. *iman* and not *imān*). References to Islamic concepts not directly related to the particular word usage of the Turkish thinkers, have been transliterated from their original Arabic forms.

Translated references made by Turkish thinkers to English sources, have been represented in their original form, rather than their translated versions.

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Introduction

The primacy of the Qur'an for the Muslim *Weltanschauung* is unmistakable. Without the Qur'an, there would be no divine message that would incept Muhammad's prophetic mission, and thus, there would be no Islam as we know it. This primacy is, at a more technical level, reinforced through the conventional theological belief that the Qur'an is itself directly related to God as His speech. As a result, the Qur'an's status is directly connected with the status of God. Since God – as the creator and master of the Universe – has the highest authority, it only follows that the will of God expressed in His speech enjoys the utmost pre-eminence. Moreover, because God is omniscient and wise, it is only expected, as al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) stated, that the greatest teaching and wisdom is contained in the speech of God (*a'zamu al-ḥikmati kalāmullāhi ta'ālā*)¹.

Given Muslim claims about the Qur'an's origins with God, anyone believing in the divine status of the Qur'an should attentively heed its calling. Moreover, the Qur'an asserts that to be heard by God one must first listen to God: "I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me: Let them also, with a will, Listen to My call, and believe in Me: That they may walk in the right way."² As the latter part of the prior verse indicates, the telos of listening is to walk in the right way. In other words, the Qur'an is not listened to in order to intuit a mere rapport by God, but in order to receive "guidance and good tidings"³. This means that the Qur'an has to be of consequence in the lives of its believers. Put differently, the Qur'an must be, what I would call, "life pertinent". For as the Qur'an states, it is a book revealed in order "that it may give admonition to any (who are) alive"⁴.

¹ Al-Ghazālī, *The Niche Of Lights*, trans. David Buchman (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 10a.

² Qur'an 2:186

³ Qur'an 2:97

⁴ Qur'an 36:70

The fourteen-century old tradition of Islamic jurisprudence lends its very existence to this premise that God's speech does not only contain historical reports (*ikhbār; qaṣas*) but also a charging address (*khiṭāb al-taklīf*) of vital pertinence.

Understanding (*fiqh*) itself is reconceptualized as an exercise in prudence wherewith one discerns how God's formal address relates to one's life. Thus, understanding is not a simple reconstructive exercise in which the verbal significance of words is made intelligible, but rather, as the grand jurist Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) defines, it is "the comprehension (*ma'rifa*) by the soul (*nafs*) of that which benefits it (*mā laḥā*) and which harms it (*ma'alayhā*)."⁵ The formal address of God can ultimately only be understood if one is able to properly relate this address to their *Lebenswelt* in terms of how it helps one to avoid the hazardous and pursue the beneficial.

Recently, Shahab Ahmad has further generalized this premise by relating it to the very core of what constitutes Islam. As Ahmad recounts:

"The historical phenomenon of Islam is the varied product of that engagement of the human with the Divine; it is the apprehension, elaboration and articulation by Muslims in their individual and collective lives of the *meaning(s) of the Truth* of the Divine Revelation"⁶.

Accordingly, rather than coinciding Islam with things such as "religion", "culture", "symbol system", or "discursive tradition"⁷, Ahmad has opted to conceptualize Islam as - what he calls - a 'hermeneutical engagement'. Islam is an "engagement by an actor or agent with a source or object of (potential) meaning in a way that ultimately produces meaning for the actor by way of the source."⁸

⁵ Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ Al-Talwīḥ 'alā Al-Tawdīḥ Li-Matni Al-Tanqīḥ Fī Uṣūl Al-Fiqh*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 16.

⁶ Shahab Ahmad, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 344.

⁷ Ahmad, 302.

⁸ Ahmad, 345.

To reformulate Ahmad's observations, Muslims have thus surrendered⁹ their selves unto God's revelation in order to organize their lives according to its truth. As Rumi (d. 1273) further ratifies this, "While I live, I will be the servant of the Qur'an."¹⁰ The Qur'an is, and always will be for Muslims, as Goethe's *diwan* lyrically claimed: "das Buch der Bücher" (the book above all books). However, regardless of the Qur'an's status, the assimilation of the truth of the Qur'an with life, was not an act performed without preponderance and discrimination. Rather, at various turns in history Muslims have sought to reflect upon the grounds and means upon which their understanding of God's revelation ought to rely and proceed. In other words, Muslims have from the very beginning of the Qur'an's history also engaged in Qur'an hermeneutics.

In the following thesis, I will explore a particular context and turn in the history of Qur'an hermeneutics that has not received as much attention as it deserves. The context of which I speak, is contemporary Turkey. The works of three present-day authors (Alpyağıl, Cündioğlu, and Öztürk) will be discussed—each of whom has contributed in their unique own ways to the contemporary discourse on Qur'an hermeneutics. The central question wherewith my engagement with their work will be guided, is as follows: *what is the status of new and variant interpretations of the Qur'an in contemporary Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics as exemplified by the works of Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Öztürk?*

Before this question is answered in the subsequent chapters, a variety of prefatory topics will be first addressed in this chapter that provide context and direction to the present thesis. These prefatory topics are as follows: the current status of Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey according to existing research, the particular importance of inquiring into the status of variant interpretations of the Qur'an in the Turkish context, and the methodological principles by which this inquiry will be

⁹ The term Muslim is the active participle of the Arabic *aslama*: "to surrender".

¹⁰ My translation from the Persian "من بنده قرآنم اگر جان دارم". Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Rūmī, "Dīwan-i Shams," accessed November 14, 2019, <https://ganjoor.net/moulavi/shams/robaeesh/sh1330/>.

answered. It is in this last part, where I will establish the principal methodological presumption of this thesis, and argue that there is a strong thematic and dialectical connection between the status of new and divergent interpretations of the Qur'an and the theoretical discussions on the possibilities and limitations of objectively interpreting the Qur'an vis-à-vis subjectively interpreting the Qur'an. Accordingly, since there is an innate thematic and dialectical relationship between both aspects, the one cannot be discussed without involving the other. Moreover, it means that the most productive way into understanding the status of new and divergent interpretations of the Qur'an in the works of the Turkish thinkers, is through a discussion of their ideas pertaining to the subjective and objective dimensions of understanding the Qur'an more broadly.

Status of prior research

A study of Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey is reflexively a study of Islamic intellectual discourse in Turkey. Without a doubt, the entire enterprise of Qur'an hermeneutics as a philosophical endeavour, to understand the grounds and the means that serve as the basis for any understanding of the Qur'an, is predicated on the existence and activity of intellectual discourse by Muslims. Qur'an hermeneutics is ultimately just one of the problems in the grand scheme of Islamic intellectual discourse. Hence, an inquiry into the current status of research of Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey, starts with an evaluation of the research of contemporary Islamic intellectual discourse in Turkey.

When it comes to the general study of Muslim intellectual discourse in Turkey, there is unanimity among some academics that research is scarce. The late sociologist Şerif Mardin (d. 2017) argued a decade ago that "In the contemporary literature on Islam and modernity the primary—and in fact overwhelming—voice is

that of a concentration on Arab or Salafi Islam.”¹¹ Likewise, Silverstein has argued that both the institutions as well as the traditions of Islamic discourse in Turkey remain “relatively unfamiliar to those otherwise knowledgeable about the Muslim world.”¹²

The current underrepresentation of Turkish thinking in Islamic studies has been explained in a variety of ways. Mardin, argued that studies on Islam in modernity failed to take the Turkish context into account, because the study of Islam in the Turkish context did not “not fit ready-made categories”¹³. Silverstein writing around the same time period concurs with this assessment by arguing that the “lack of interest is based on conceptualizations of the scope nature of Islamic traditions in recent centuries and their relationship to modernity that are in need of profound reformulation in light of the Ottoman and Turkish experience”¹⁴. On the other hand, Silverstein also argues that researchers lack the necessary language skills in order to attend to Islamic intellectual discourse in Turkey¹⁵.

Other researchers, however, have made more moderate assessments by arguing that only particular fields have been neglected. Wilkinson has recently argued that while there exists ‘much prior’ sociological and political scholarship on religion in Turkey, “little work has been done to explicitly examine Turkish theological voices for their theological value.”¹⁶ Likewise, Dorroll has argued that while there does exist studies on Islamic thought in the Turkish Republic, these studies have been

¹¹ Mardin’s statement is further supported by the advanced attention given towards the translation of the works of Arab authors in English, French, or German, while I have yet to discover one single monograph of a contemporary Turkish Muslim intellectual translated to the previously mentioned languages. Şerif Mardin, “Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes,” *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 2 (January 1, 2005): 148.

¹² Brian Silverstein, “Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey: Hermeneutics, Tradition, Genealogy,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 1 (2005): 134–60.

¹³ Mardin, “Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes,” 148.

¹⁴ Silverstein, “Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey: Hermeneutics, Tradition, Genealogy,” 137.

¹⁵ Silverstein, 136.

¹⁶ Taraneh Wilkinson, “Dialectics Not Dualities: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue” (Georgetown University, 2017), 10.

prevalently focused on conservative groups, and have therefore, neglected the more “liberal” voices¹⁷. Finally, without expressing any judgment on the general field of research, Körner has simply assessed that Turkey still remains “a great blank on the Western maps of Muslim exegesis.”¹⁸ Although, this latter claim carries less weight now in light of Pink’s recent studies¹⁹ on modern Muslim commentaries in Turkey and Indonesia.

Recognizing the various lacunae, the prior authors have all sought in their own way to contribute to the further research of Islamic discourse in Turkey. However, the fact remains that only a few studies have been wholly dedicated to the philosophical aspects of Qur’an hermeneutics in the Turkish context. The most well-known of these studies is Körner’s *Revisionist Koran hermeneutics in contemporary Turkish University Theology: rethinking Islam*. The second monograph that comes close to Körner’s work is Wilkinson’s dissertation *Dialectics not Dualities: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue*. However, this work has a peripheral interest in hermeneutics. As Wilkinson states, “Finally, with Körner, I signal the importance of engaging and understanding Turkish theological discussions—but for a broader purpose than Qur’ān hermeneutics.”²⁰

Despite being one of the seminal contributions to this field, Körner’s work only focused on a particular “strain of thought”²¹ in Turkish Qur’an hermeneutics, respectively the thought belonging to ‘the Ankara School’. The Ankara School, however, is a movement pre-dominantly comprised of a “small group of avant-

¹⁷ Philip Dorroll, “‘The Turkish Understanding of Religion’: Rethinking Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Turkish Islamic Thought,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82 (November 17, 2014): 1035.

¹⁸ Felix. Körner, “Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology : Rethinking Islam” (Ergon, 2005), 21.

¹⁹ Johanna. Pink, *Muslim Qur’ānic Interpretation Today* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2019).

²⁰ Wilkinson, “Dialectics Not Dualities: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue,” 57.

²¹ Dorroll, “‘The Turkish Understanding of Religion’: Rethinking Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Turkish Islamic Thought,” 1039.

garde reformist theology professors from Ankara University.”²² Accordingly, by virtue of this limitation, the principal narrative on Qur’an hermeneutics in Turkey that exists in Western literature, is the one rooted in the institutional history and thought of the Ankara University. However, there are still vitally important unmapped areas left in the contemporary discourse on Qur’an hermeneutics in Turkey that are waiting to be uncovered. Hence, as I will demonstrate, a larger understanding of Turkish Qur’an hermeneutics involves more than the mere comprehension of the history and discussions pertaining to the Ankara School.

The Ankara School: history and hermeneutics

To better understand these uncharted areas of Turkish Qur’an hermeneutics, it is pertinent to explore and elaborate a bit more on the particular findings of prior research, even if it is predominantly limited to the Ankara School. By having a more complete understanding of the discourse on Qur’an hermeneutics produced by the Ankara School, we can subsequently better understand which types of discourse have been left out of consideration in existing scholarship.

The origins of the Ankara School can be retraced to various reforms of religious education in Turkey that took place in the late-Ottoman era and the beginning of the Turkish Republic. As Körner describes it, “The origin of Turkey's higher religious education of today is paradoxical in many ways. It is traditional and it is a novelty, it continues Ottoman lines and takes up Western structures, it follows a Kemalist programme and it may prove to be of worldwide relevance for Islam.”²³ However, the politics and ideology that lays at the root of the constitution of the Ankara

²² Recep Şentürk, “Islamic Reformist Discourses and Intellectuals in Turkey: Permanent Religion with Dynamic Law,” in *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, ed. Shireen T Hunter (London: M.E.Sharpe, 2008), 236.

²³ Körner, “Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology : Rethinking Islam,” 48.

University, inevitably reverberates through the subsequent discourse on Qur'an hermeneutics in the Ankara School.

Before the existence of such institutions as the Ankara Faculty of Divinity, religious education was historically provided in Turkey by the madrasas (*medresele*).

However, when Western influence expanded to the Ottoman state, new ideas concerning education emerged. During the period of Tanzimat²⁴ these ideas were put to effect by establishing a second type of educational institutes, the maktabas (*mektepler*). While the madrasas provided traditional and religious education, the maktabas were to provide "a Westernized or modern type of education."²⁵

For decades these institutions co-existed, until the law of unification (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat*) was passed in 1924. With the law of unification in place, both the madrasas and maktabas fell under the administrative and financial authority of the Ministry of Education. However, since both institutions were now under state authority, the Minister of Education Hüseyin Vasıf Çınar (d. 1935) decided to close all the traditional madrasas, and open new secondary level religious schools (Imam Hatip schools) as well as the first university of religious studies inspired by Western standards (the Darülfünun Faculty of Theology)²⁶.

The uprooting of the Turkish educational system was both appreciated by some and bitterly criticized by others. The closure of the madrasas was regarded by conservative media as a gravely biased attack on old institutions that led to 16,000 scholars and their families being financially and socially ruined. On the other hand, secular media depicted the abolishing of madrasas as a positive change. Journalist

²⁴ "The word *tanzimat* means "reforms," "rearrangement," and "re-organization," and in Ottoman history, the Tanzimat period refers to a time of Westernizing reforms from 1839 until 1876." Coşkun Çakır, "Tanzimat," in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters (Infobase Publishing, 2009), 553.

²⁵ Mehmet Pacacı and Yasin Aktay, "75 Years of Higher Religious Education in Modern Turkey," in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. I. M. Abu-Rabi' (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 124.

²⁶ Pacacı and Aktay, 126.

and politician Falih Rifkî (d. 1971), found the government's actions brave and cause for the overnight eradication of 16,000 dogmatists²⁷. However, the establishment of the Darulfünun Faculty of Theology, was neither fully appreciated by conservatives nor modernists. The modernists found the curriculum to be too narrow-minded and strict, whereas the conservatives - ironically - found the curriculum insufficiently religious²⁸.

Both the Imam Hatip schools and the Darulfünun Faculty of Theology would ultimately only enjoy a short lifespan. In 1932 the Imam Hatip schools were shut²⁹, and in 1933 the Darulfünun Faculty of Theology closed down on account of a lack of students. Various policies were in place that restricted the graduates of Imam Hatip schools from attending the Darulfünun Faculty of Theology. For starters, Imam Hatip schools were not given the status of a lyceum, and were hence, unable to qualify students for a further university level of education. In other words, an otherwise potential influx of students graduating from the Imam Hatip schools, could not further advance their secondary level religious education with a subsequent university degree in religious studies³⁰.

The consequent lack of proper religious education was experienced by some to be very demoralizing for the future presence of religion in Turkey. Parliamentary deputy and journalist Cihat Baban (d. 1984) had observed that in the countryside there were no longer clergy men able to bury the dead. Moreover, people were starting to fall prey to various superstitions³¹. Tuncer, another contemporary writer, drew an even bleaker prospect by arguing that without proper training, religious knowledge would go extinct³².

²⁷ Pacaci and Aktay, 125.

²⁸ Pacaci and Aktay, 127.

²⁹ Körner, "Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology : Rethinking Islam," 49.

³⁰ Pacaci and Aktay, "75 Years of Higher Religious Education in Modern Turkey," 127.

³¹ Körner, "Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology : Rethinking Islam," 50.

³² Körner, 50.

Politicians were highly aware of these sentiments and chose out of electoral interests to reinstitute the Imam Hatip schools and pursue the plans for a new Islamic theological faculty. Tahsin Banguoğlu (d. 1950), the present Minister of Education, had assured the Parliament that the new faculty would be worthy of Atatürk's revolution and would not work in the spirit of the medrese but against "regressive trends"³³. The Senate of the Ankara University decided to examine this project and open a faculty of divinity according to Western standards rather than the conventional madrasa model. This decision was pursued "In order to make the investigation of religious questions according to the possible scientific principles, and also to provide the required conditions for raising men of religion effective in their profession and comprehensive in their thinking."³⁴ In other words, the Ankara Faculty of Divinity was instituted to remedy the problem of waning religious expertise and to serve as "the flagship institution for an enlightened and reformist understanding of Islam in the Republic of Turkey."³⁵

This historical emphasis on reform and the concomitant negotiation between tradition and modernity, would ultimately also resonate through the subsequent way in which the Ankara School was shaped as a particular intellectual movement. This is evident from the fact that important members of the Ankara School are not only guided in their thinking by traditional thinkers and methodologies but also by Western non-Muslim authors and methodologies. Accordingly, there is an eclecticism to be discovered in the discourse produced by the Ankara School with influences ranging from Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) and Hassan Hanafi to Joseph Schacht (d. 1969) and Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921). This eclecticism is further enhanced with the adoption of recent western methodological instruments such as

³³ Pacaci and Aktay, "75 Years of Higher Religious Education in Modern Turkey," 130.

³⁴ Pacaci and Aktay, 130.

³⁵ Dorroll, "'The Turkish Understanding of Religion': Rethinking Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Turkish Islamic Thought," 1038.

hermeneutics, structuralism, phenomenology, and process philosophy³⁶. Besides its evident dialectical nature that mediates between traditional and non-Islamic sources, researchers such as Şentürk and Körner have also noted clear reformist overtones in the discourse of the Ankara School. Şentürk, for example, has categorized the members of the Ankara School as the third generation of reformist Muslim intellectuals in Turkey. Whereas previous generations sought to reform predominantly through the traditional paradigm of Islamic legal hermeneutics (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), the Ankara School relies rather on “modern Western methods of scriptural interpretation”³⁷. Likewise, Körner understands the members of the Ankara School as clearly involved in an enterprise of rethinking, and hence, reforming Islam³⁸.

Regardless of its inner eclecticism, there is an overarching motif to be discovered in the reformist discourse produced by the Ankara School. This motif can be more specifically described as a historicist approach to Islam, which ultimately extends to the Qur’an. The latter has even received a particular appellation and is commonly known as *Kur’an tarihselcilik* (Qur’an historicism). Nevertheless, if we are to condense the historicist approach by the Ankara School into a central hermeneutical tenet, it would be that the Qur’an can only be properly understood when the Qur’an’s ‘historical materiality’ is taken into account.

This major hermeneutical tenet can be further elucidated with an example from Omer Özsoy’s works, who is one of the most prominent members of the Ankara School. Özsoy has argued that the Qur’an should be understood as an oral discourse that is embedded in a particular historical context. As with all oral discourse, there is always a dialogical situation involved that directs the meaning of speech: something is always spoken in a particular situation with a specific intent in mind. Since, the written Qur’an is a record of God’s oral discourse, it only follows that it

³⁶ Şentürk, “Islamic Reformist Discourses and Intellectuals in Turkey: Permanent Religion with Dynamic Law,” 232.

³⁷ Şentürk, 232.

³⁸ Körner, “Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology : Rethinking Islam,” 15.

too was presented in a dialogical situation that is external to the Qur'an (*metin dışı bağlam*)³⁹. Accordingly, as Özsoy argues, to fully understand the Qur'an, it is necessary to reconstruct the original dialogical situation in which it was revealed. Given that the Qur'an was revealed in the past, it is only natural that the reconstruction of the original dialogical situation of the Qur'an is realised through a historical reconstruction⁴⁰.

One could wonder to what degree such ideas are revisionist or reformist, as Korner and Şentürk have depicted it to be, when traditional Islamic hermeneutics has in fact always given an important place to the historical context. In classical Islamic thinking, for example, there exists a particular concept, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, that investigates and employs in interpretation the historical data pertaining to the occasions that were cause for the revelation of a particular verse. Accordingly, from a methodological angle, there is nothing novel or revisionist to Qur'an historicism per se. However, it could be argued that the real revisionism is involved on the level of how the Qur'an is conceptualized. This is clearly evident in the opening section of Özsoy's article on the historicity of the Qur'an's address (*Kur'an hitabının tarihselliği*) wherein Özsoy proposes the revaluation of the dominant dogma (*egemen dogma*) that the Qur'an is a universal text (*evrensel metin*)⁴¹. Accordingly, Özsoy suggests that we should understand the Qur'an as an address from within history (historical and particular in content), rather than an address to humans from above history (transhistorical and universal in content), as the Qur'an has conventionally been understood. It is this shift in conceptualization that constitutes the real revision, not so much its methodological connotations.

³⁹ The expression used by Özsoy is *metin dışı bağlam*. This expression literally translates as the 'relation exterior to the text'. Which, in the context of the Turkish hermeneutical authors means the socio-cultural situation from and to which the Qur'an was speaking. Ömer Özsoy, "Kur'an Hitabının Tarihselliği ve Tarihsel Hitabın Nesnel Anlamı Üzerine," *İslâmî Araştırmalar* 9, no. 1-2-3-4 (1996): 138.

⁴⁰ Özsoy, 139.

⁴¹ Özsoy, 135.

Now that we have a better grasp on the discourse produced by the Ankara School, we can assert that the only seminal study on Qur'an hermeneutics, Körner's, is ultimately a study on a type of Qur'an hermeneutics that is historicist, reformist, and academic. However, when the current literature in Turkey is taken into account concerning Qur'an hermeneutics, we also discover other vantages into hermeneutics that are neither academic, reformist or historicist.

In Turkey, part of the Islamic intellectual discourse is produced by modern academia. There has been a particular designation in Turkey for academic institutions that produce Islamic discourse. This designation is better known as *ilahiyat*, and those who are trained by these institutes are called *ilâhiyatçı*. However, there are also other important contributors to the discourse in Islam in Turkey who are not *ilâhiyatçı*. An important group in this regard are the *araştırmacı yazarlar*, or 'research-writers' as Silverstein literally translates their appellation. These research-writers are "widely known through their journalistic activities, writing columns in dailies and weeklies, editorial work at publishing houses, and scholarly monographs."⁴² One research-writer that has extensively written on the topic of Qur'an hermeneutics, and whose works are waiting to be studied, is Dücan Cündioğlu. Cündioğlu, contrary to the members of the Ankara School, argues in a way that can be best summed by his self-proposed slogan: "not the advancement of the new [but] the discovery of the old (*vaz`-ı cedid değil, keşf-i kadim*)"⁴³. Thus, as Cündioğlu's exemplifies, there is still a critical discourse on Qur'an hermeneutics to be explored that is deliberately conservative and produced at the periphery of academia, rather than only focused on the modernist/reformist and produced within academia.

⁴² Silverstein, "Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey: Hermeneutics, Tradition, Genealogy," 136.

⁴³ Dücan Cündioğlu, "Vaz`-ı Cedîd Mi, Keşf-i Kadîm Mi? (Varlık/Nesne>Düşünce/Kavram>Dil/Sözcük Bağıntısına Dair)," *Kur'an ve Dil : Dilbilim ve Hermenötik Sempozyumu (17-18 Mayıs 2001)* XV, no. 542 (2002): 467.

On the other hand, while historically speaking the Ankara University spearheaded the academic discourse in Turkey on Qur'an hermeneutics, in recent times discourse produced by the academic landscape has become more diversified on account of the growth and participation of new ilahiyat faculties and scholars. For ten years, the Ankara University was the predominant institution of higher religious education. However, in the last fifty years an additional twenty-two faculties have become established outside of Ankara⁴⁴. These faculties have developed their own trajectories and supported the careers of diverse academicians. One clear example of the latter is Recep Alpyağıl. Alpyağıl, a former alumnus of Istanbul University, is presently a professor of philosophy of religion at the faculty of divinity in Istanbul. What clearly differentiates Alpyağıl from his Ankara cohorts, is his critique of the historicist method in understanding the Qur'an. Moreover, rather than having any reformist interest, Alpyağıl's works engage with western thinking not to shed a critical light on conventional hermeneutical ideas but to transpose familiar questions from the Islamic tradition into new frameworks adopted from Western philosophy and reinvestigate their answers in light of these new frameworks. Thus, Alpyağıl's works present an opportunity to uncover a perspective on Qur'an hermeneutics that is in some respects antithetical to the ideas and *modus operandi* of the Ankara School of Qur'an hermeneutics.

Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu exemplify the heterogeneity of Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics by virtue of how their approach contrasts with the interests and methods of the Ankara School. However, there is also a category of thinking that can be best described as resonating with the Ankara School of thinking but developed in its own distinctive way. One such intricate example would be the works of Mustafa Öztürk. Öztürk, a former alumnus and professor of Ondokuz Mayıs University, is not formally acknowledged to be part of the Ankara School; for, he is neither a former Ankara University alumni nor staff member. However, Öztürk has endorsed a historical-critical approach to the Qur'an that is akin to the views of the Ankara

⁴⁴ Pacaci and Aktay, "75 Years of Higher Religious Education in Modern Turkey," 140.

School. So much so, that the same publishing house that regularly distributes the works of the members of the Ankara School, is also the home of the works of Öztürk. Given the fact that Körner formally only interested himself in the Ankara School, it is understandable why Körner ignored to study the works of Öztürk in his monograph. However, because of this fact, there is still much more to explore in respect to Öztürk's contributions to the present discussion on Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey.

Following the example of previous studies, the present thesis also purports to further the understanding of a relatively unexplored segment of Islamic intellectual discourse in Turkey – in this case being the discourse on Qur'an hermeneutics formulated independently from or adjacent to the ideas of the Ankara School. Accordingly, by studying the theories formulated by Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Öztürk, I wish to advance the study of Qur'an hermeneutics that was previously pioneered by Körner. This thesis should be considered as a further continuation of an-going exploration of the different areas of Islamic intellectual discourse on the Qur'an in modern Turkey.

With the status of current research being clarified, as well as how this research has informed the choice of studying these particular Turkish authors, it is now imperative to delve into the further justification and elaboration of the main question. The main question of this thesis has been presented as follows: what is the status of new and variant interpretations of the Qur'an in contemporary Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics as exemplified by the works of Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Öztürk? The inquiry into the status of new and variant interpretations has been particularly formulated to congrue with the deliberative character of present-day Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey. In other words, it takes into account the recent shift in contemporary Turkish intellectual thought from the actual production of a new exegesis of the Qur'an towards a meditation on the grounds upon which new interpretations can or should proceed.

The deliberative nature of Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics can be explained by a variety of genealogies. The first of which, is inevitably related to the historicity of Turkish reform of religious education. The specifics of this were previously discussed in reference to the Ankara School. As such, by virtue of its reformist and modernist orientation, institutions such as the Ankara School provided the material conditions for the further development and proliferation of a discourse specifically embedded in the desire to rethink Islam, and hence, our understanding of the Qur'an. However, a further investigation of the Turkish intellectual discourse on the Qur'an will demonstrate that reform is but one of the impulses behind the rethinking of the ways in which the Qur'an is interpreted. Another noteworthy impetus has been the desire to reflect on and respond to a perceived excessiveness in how the Qur'an is interpreted in Turkey. An excessiveness that is bolstered by an exuberance of ideologically motivated, anachronistic interpretations of the Qur'an that are perceived to be intellectually dishonest and/or theoretically defunct.

This kind of excessiveness can especially be evidenced in the continuously growing market of Turkish translations of the Qur'an (*mealler*). For every ideology in Turkey there is an accompanying and vindicating Qur'an translation.

A clear example of the imprint of political ideologies on the interpretation of the Qur'an, can be discovered in Hasan Basri Çantay's (d. 1964) popular translation of the Qur'an titled *Kur'ân-ı Hakîm ve Meâl-i Kerîm*⁴⁵. Çantay was a critic of Bolshevism. He advised the 1st Parliament of Turkey that Bolshevik propaganda must be met with furore (*hiddet*) and not acceptance (*mukabele*)⁴⁶. Accordingly, in verses 56:27-48 the Qur'an lauds the *aşhâb al-maymana* and critiques the *aşhâb al-*

⁴⁵ Cündioğlu recalls that a Turkish paper was gifting this translation to readers who had collected enough coupons. Accordingly, by collecting enough coupons as a 17-year-old, Cündioğlu's first translation of the Qur'an was the one written by Çantay. "Düçane Cündioğlu: Türkiye'deki Tek Filozof Benim," 2007, <https://www.yenisafak.com/yenisafakpazar/duçane-cundioglu-turkiyedeki-tek-filozof-benim-71827>.

⁴⁶ *Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, vol. 1, 1921, 329, <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/GZC/d01/CILT01/gcz01001136.pdf>.

shimāl. The prior is translated by Yusuf Ali as the “Companions of the Right Hand”, whereas the latter is translated as “Companions of the Left Hand”. However, Çantay has translated these expressions as “right-wing supporters” (*sağcılar*) and “leftists” (*solcular*)⁴⁷, thereby directing the praise of the Qur’an to political supporters of the right, and the Qur’an’s scorn to the supporters of the left.

Çantay’s interpretation demonstrates a reading of the Qur’an in which the original context of the text is ignored in order to make an anachronistic, ideological point. For, if we take the context of the text into consideration, we discover that the Qur’an critiques the *aşhāb al-shimāl* - ironically - due to the fact that the *aşhāb al-shimāl* “indulged, before that, in wealth (and luxury)”⁴⁸ and questioned the resurrection⁴⁹. Hence, a forceful interpretative leap is necessitated in order to conflate the *aşhāb al-shimāl*, namely Muhammad’s polytheist detractors, with modern supporters of left-wing socialist and communist politics.

Another example of a well-known translation of the Qur’an that vindicates the ideology of its author through anachronistic readings, is found in the translation of Edip Yüksel, who has been publicly critiqued by Cündioğlu for its ideological excesses. Yüksel who comes from a conservative Muslim family, later became an ardent critic of traditional Sunni tenants and sources. He would particularly disagree with the Sunni reliance on reports from the Prophet as an explanation and application of the Qur’an. For Yüksel the hadith literature is full of fabrications and nonsense⁵⁰. Given the controversy surrounding Yüksel, Cündioğlu recalls how he challenged a publisher for announcing the desire to print Yüksel’s translation of the Qur’an. However, the publisher retorted by firstly arguing that they knew this translation would sell a lot, because it was “full of exigencies” (*aşırılıklarla dolu*).

⁴⁷ Hasan Basri Çantay, *Kur’ân-ı Hakîm ve Meâl-i Kerîm*, 15th ed., vol. 3 (İstanbul: Mürşit Çantay, 1990), 998–99.

⁴⁸ Quran 56:45

⁴⁹ “And they used to say, “What! when we die and become dust and bones, shall we then indeed be raised up again?”. Quran 56:47

⁵⁰ Edip Yüksel, “Why Trash All the Hadiths?,” 2012.

Moreover, had they declined to publish this translation, some other publisher would have done so in their stead⁵¹.

As for these exigencies, Cündioğlu has documented a variety of them in his writings for the conservative newspaper Yeni Şafak. However, one example will suffice to demonstrate the previously made point about anachronistic, exigent readings of the Qur'an motivated by ideology. This example pertains to Yüksel's translation of verse 12:111. The beginning of this verse is translated by Yusuf Ali as "There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented". However, rather than translating the Arabic word *ḥadīth* mentioned in this verse according to its everyday use of "tale" as Yusuf Ali did, or its Turkish equivalent "söz", Yüksel purposefully employs the highly technical Turkish term *hadis*. This interpretation, as Cündioğlu observes, is not so much the text speaking but the author's stance on the literature of *ḥadīth* (*hadis tartışmalarındaki kişisel tutumu*)⁵². An observation that is vindicated by the English version of Yüksel's Qur'an translation, where Yüksel explains his translation in the exegetical endnotes as follows:

"In this verse, God the Most Wise, rejects both the "hadith" and the basic excuse for accepting it as a source of Islam. No excuse is accepted from the followers of hadith in this world, nor on the Day of Judgment. The followers of fabricated hadiths claim that the Quran is not sufficiently detailed! They thus reject God's repeated assertion that the Quran is "complete, perfect, and sufficiently detailed" (6:19,38,114), and thereby justify the creation of 60 volumes of hadith, and a library full of contradictory teachings that are supposed to complete the Quran."⁵³

This example from Yüksel, demonstrates again a translation of the Qur'an in which the original Arabic is being forced to make an exhortative, anachronistic point by

⁵¹ Dücan Cündioğlu, "Bir Mütenebbi'nin Ultra-Modern Çevirisi: 'Mesaj' (I)," Yeni Şafak, 2000, <https://www.yenisafak.com/arsiv/2000/aralik/22/dcundioglu.html>.

⁵² Dücan Cündioğlu, "Bir Mütenebbi'nin Ultra-Modern Çevirisi: 'Mesaj' (VII)," Yeni Şafak, 2001, <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ducanecundioglu/bir-mutenebbinin-ultra-modern-cevirisi-mesaj-vii-45643>.

⁵³ Edip Yüksel, Layth Saleh Al-Shaiban, and Martha Schulte-Nafeh, *Quran: A Reformist Translation* (Brainbow Press, 2007), 182.

virtue of the personal ideology of the author. In this case being an author that belongs to the “Qur’an alone” movement⁵⁴. It is true that orthographically the word *ḥadīth* might lend itself to this interpretation, but it is a generally accepted fact that the technical term *ḥadīth* came to be developed in the centuries following the Qur’an’s revelation, and hence, could not have been intended by the Qur’an unless one is willing to concede to the fact that the Qur’an spoke in terms unfamiliar and ahead of its original audience. Accordingly, Cündioğlu and others interpret *ḥadīth* in harmony with its 6th century everyday use, which is “tale”, and not its later technical sense, namely a record containing the words or actions of the Prophet.

These examples should illustrate some of the types of ideologically motivated, anachronistic interpretations of the Qur’an that were in circulation to which various Turkish intellectuals, the authors of this dissertation notwithstanding⁵⁵, subsequently responded to with their hermeneutical inquiries and essays. Scientists, liberals, conservatives, post-modernists, and so forth, were all perceived according to their individual opponents as interpreting the Qur’an in anachronistic ways that accorded with their *Weltanschauung*. Both proponents and opponents of such interpretations, as the next sections will further explore, had to subsequently reflect on the hermeneutical grounds that would warrant or reject a certain interpretation of the Qur’an.

The return to the Qur’an

This proliferation of ideologically divergent interpretations of the Qur’an in Turkey, can be retraced to a variety of historical determinants. A significant study that helps us further understand these historical determinants is Omer Özsoy’s *Discussions on*

⁵⁴ Sometimes also referred to as Quranism.

⁵⁵ One of Öztürk’s first works was titled *Kur'an'ı Kendi Tarihinde Okumak: Tefsirde Anakronizme Ret Yazıları* (“Reading the Qur’an According to Its Own History: Writings that Refute Anachronism in Tafsīr”).

*Qur'an Hermeneutics in Turkey: An Attempt at Genealogy*⁵⁶. This essay, which remains untranslated and overlooked by prior research, retraces the origins of recent discussions on Qur'an hermeneutics to the intellectual atmosphere of the latter half of the twentieth century. An intellectual atmosphere that was characterized by a growing desire for *öze dönüş*, which can be translated as a 'return to oneself' or 'return to one's kernel.' The Qur'an has always been a vital guide and identity marker since the inception of Islam. As such, in a country whose majority has historically been Muslim, a return to the source or kernel of one's spiritual identity, meant inevitably a return to the Qur'an. As Özsoy puts it in more concrete terms, it meant "to classify (*adlandırma*) life and things anew from the perspective of the Qur'an, and to reconsider (*yeniden ele alma*) the concepts and world of ideas within the Qur'an."⁵⁷

The desire to return to the Qur'an as a defining spirit of Turkish religious thought was spurred by a variety of historical developments. The rise and presence of academic theology (*akademik ilâhiyatçılık*) and its attempt to rethink tradition, was undeniably one of the contributing factors. This aspect has already been discussed in respect to the Ankara School and its history. However, according to Özsoy, the translations of the works of Arab and Iranian Islamist thinkers was another important contributor to the desire to return *ad fontis*. Despite himself being a later generation Ankara alumnus, Özsoy acknowledges without embarrassment that there were fundamental trust issues and a rift between devout believers (*dindar halk*) and the Ankara Faculty of Divinity⁵⁸. On the other hand, devout believers could also not resort to the state-led Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), as they were oblivious to the present-day issues. Nor could people turn to the conventional religious communities (*cemaatler*), since they were being ostracized and oppressed. Turkish intellectual religious thought was thus left to receive

⁵⁶ Ömer Özsoy, "Türkiye'de Kur'an Hermeneutiği Tartışmaları - Bir Soykütüğü Denemesi -," in *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Yazıları*, 2nd ed. (Ankara: Otto, 2015).

⁵⁷ Özsoy, 19.

⁵⁸ Özsoy, 18–19.

direction from elsewhere, more specifically from Egypt, Pakistan, and Iran. This direction was subsequently received from the 1960s onwards with translations of popular works, such as Seyyid Qutb's (d. 1966) *In the Shade of the Qur'an* and Mawdudi's (d. 1979) *Four Key Concepts of the Qur'an*. It were these kinds of works that Özsoy claims inspired "contemporary children of a people that had for centuries been unaccustomed to reading the Qur'an⁵⁹, to face off with the Qur'an as an individual (*birey*) and become acquainted with an attitude to read the Qur'an with an intent towards understanding it."⁶⁰

The Qur'an had initially been revisited by progressives, but their critical attitude towards tradition further instigated the participation of conservative groups. As Özsoy recounts, progressives would respond to the call to return to the Qur'an with publications that revisited familiar concepts in ways that were counter to traditional perspectives. From the 1980s onwards different works were published with designations such as "X according to the Qur'an" or "X in the Qur'an", but in reality they were meant to say "X according to the Qur'an, rather than what we have known from tradition"⁶¹. Accordingly, in order to respond to this ongoing attack on traditional interpretations, conservative groups had no choice but to also participate in Qur'an related discussions. This participation continued to such an extent, that by the 1990s the most radical and conservative religious groups had also shifted their discursive focus to how the Qur'an was being understood⁶².

It is also important to note the market consequences of this widening interest in the Qur'an, since it further agitated the growth of variant interpretations of the Qur'an. Özsoy recounts how the demand to understand the Qur'an directly led to the

⁵⁹ Since it was normally interpreted by religious authorities and not the common individual, and it was revealed in a tongue that was unfamiliar to them, i.e. Arabic and not Turkish.

⁶⁰ Özsoy, "Türkiye'de Kur'an Hermeneutiği Tartışmaları - Bir Soykütüğü Denemesi -," 19.

⁶¹ Özsoy, 19.

⁶² Özsoy, 20.

publication craze (*furya*) of *tafsir* and *meal*⁶³ literature that started in the 80s and reached its apex during the 90s⁶⁴. This ‘craze’ might be best illustrated by the sheer amount of Qur’an translations that have then come into circulation. While Özsoy does not present a specific tally, Üstun has argued that as of 2012 there are 500 translations of the Qur’an that are currently in circulation in Turkey⁶⁵.

The fact that the return to the Qur’an was further supported by the particular medium of translation, is more than a simple coincidence. As much as the Qur’an is part of one’s core being, so is also the Turkish language. It should come as no surprise that the history of the Turkish Republic has become witness to ambitions and policies in which the return to Islam, and thus, the Qur’an, went hand in hand with nationalist aspirations. The most notorious example of this was the state-enforced change of the Arabic call to prayer into Turkish in 1932. However, another instance of Turkifying the Islamic experience pertained to the desire to “reacquaint the Turkish nation with the Qur’an in its own language”⁶⁶ As the infamous bard of Turkish nationalism Ziya Gökalp (d. 1924) romantically recanted:

A country in whose mosques the call to prayer is in Turkish
A villager would even understand the supplication in the prayer
A country in whose schools the Qur’an is read in Turkish
Young and old would know the commands of God
Turkish son! Yours is this homeland!⁶⁷

As each ideologically different stakeholder within Turkish religious thinking directed their focus towards the Qur’an, not only were there diverse interpretations of the Qur’an proposed but also variant preconceptions (*tassavurlar*) of the Qur’an that

⁶³ Whereas, *tafsir* is a familiar term used in various Islamicate languages, *meal* is distinct to the Turkish language. Accordingly, to translate these terms, *tafsir* refers in Turkey to the exegesis of the Qur’an, and *meal* refers to the translation of the Qur’an

⁶⁴ Özsoy, “Türkiye’de Kur’an Hermeneutiği Tartışmaları - Bir Soykütüğü Denemesi -,” 21.

⁶⁵ Sema Üstun, “Cumhuriyetin İlanından Günümüze Kur’an Tercüme Üzerine,” *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi* 10, no. 19–20 (2012): 457.

⁶⁶ Özsoy, “Türkiye’de Kur’an Hermeneutiği Tartışmaları - Bir Soykütüğü Denemesi -,” 20.

⁶⁷ Ziya Gökalp, “Vatan,” accessed December 2, 2019, <http://www.siirleri.org/siir/5553/Vatan.html> (my translation).

further directed these interpretations. Özsoy finds no better description than to call this situation a postmodern anarchy (*postmodern anarşi*) due to the fragmented superabundance of different interpretations and conceptualizations of the Qur'an. However, what is of note, is the proliferated presence of Qur'an interpretations and conceptualizations led to the urgency of meta-level reflections on the interpretation of the Qur'an; since, as Özsoy recounts, the presence of countless interpretations and theories of the Qur'an exposed the absence of solid methodological foundations (*bilimsel yöntemsizlik*) and ethical principles (*etik ilkesellik*) in Qur'an studies⁶⁸.

While Özsoy's essay is unequalled in its attempt at reconstructing the genealogical origins of Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey, it unfortunately leaves out some important details. As a consequence, some matters are left implied, rather than outright stated. A case in point involves the prior claim that the oversaturation of Qur'an studies further aggrandised an awareness of how the field of Qur'an studies lacked solid methodological and ethical foundations. While not explicated by Özsoy, this inversely means that there must have been new interpretations and studies of the Qur'an circulating that were perceived to be either methodologically unsound and/or disingenuous. Accordingly, Özsoy's claim implies that all the meta-level discussions on interpreting the Qur'an that were subsequently carried out from the 1990s onwards by both academicians and non-academicians in various publications and symposia, including those by the authors studied in this thesis, were to an important degree spurred by a deliberate need to respond to a perceived excess in Qur'an studies caused by unscrupulous and non-methodological approaches.

The correlation between meta-level discussions on the interpretation of the Qur'an and the anarchy of Qur'an interpretations, is however more explicitly confirmed by Özsoy in relation to academic theology. As Özsoy states, "A group of academic theologians brought to the fore the historical character of the Qur'an as a

⁶⁸ Özsoy, "Türkiye'de Kur'an Hermeneutiği Tartışmaları - Bir Soykütüğü Denemesi -," 22.

methodological problem in order to respond to the exigencies in interpretation (*aşırı yorumlar*) that were spurred by the unexpected rapid increase of the Qur'an becoming current within Turkish religious thought"⁶⁹ This exigency, whose details are once more omitted, becomes more clear with a familiarity of the discourse by Qur'an historicists. Accordingly, as the chapter on Öztürk will vindicate, the typical critique that Qur'an historicists share, is that non-historicists over universalize the content and the pertinence of the Qur'an. Hence, exigency in this context, is to indiscriminately read the Qur'an without regarding the historical characteristics of the Qur'an.

As the ongoing chapters will illustrate, this leitmotif of responding with theory to perceived exigencies in interpretation, is shared also by either non-academic or non-historicist intellectuals. Cündioğlu, for example, is not someone with an academic background, but his work does respond on a meta-level to what he has perceived as certain exigencies in circulating Qur'an interpretations. One of the very reasons Cündioğlu resorts to a higher-level theoretical debate, is the fact that he wants to deal with the problem of false interpretations wholesale rather than with each individual interpretation. Accordingly, Cündioğlu's work seeks to reflect and define the course of the presumptions that background and direct interpretation, rather than the interpretations themselves.

With the problem of exigency as a central leitmotif, Turkish meta-level discussions on the Qur'an have inevitably concerned themselves with questions as to whether anyone can or should offer their particular take on the Qur'an? Whether it is necessary or not to adhere to a method or ethical principles when interpreting the Qur'an? In other words, a central motive behind recent debates in Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey was to make theoretical sense of all these different interpretations of the Qur'an that were increasingly circulating. Accordingly, I have chosen to define the main question of this thesis in reference to this historical

⁶⁹ Özsoy, 24.

incentive, so as to centre and embed the proposed charting of Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics around one of its foundational problems.

On the other hand, besides being a context-appropriate, and thus, methodologically conducive question, there are undoubtedly also other considerations. One such important consideration, is in regard to its social relevance. For example, in the Netherlands there has been a decadelong debate by both Muslims and non-Muslims on the status of 'nether Islam' (*polderislam*), that is an Islam that has been tailored specifically to the Dutch context. However, to what extent Islam can be translated and tailored to a specific context that is foreign to the historical situation from which it arose, has already been answered extensively by Turkish thinkers. Thus, a study of Turkish thinking that has specifically concerned itself with such questions in regard to the Qur'an, is certainly - to a degree - also relevant for the prior mentioned discussions that take place today in the Netherlands.

The problem of subjectivity-objectivity as the main thematical framework

As the previous section demonstrated, since the 1990s onwards, the history of Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey can be retraced to an imperative to respond at a theoretical level to the perceived exigencies in ever-increasing sectional interpretations of the Qur'an. However, when the theories themselves are studied, we discover that a noticeable strand within these theories pertains to discussions on objectivity and subjectivity in interpretation. Thus, contextually speaking the recent theories on Qur'an hermeneutics are rooted in the desire to respond to the perceived exigencies in ever-increasing divergent⁷⁰ understandings of the Qur'an, but in respect to content, they are concerned with the abstract problems of subjectivity vis-à-vis objectivity in understanding. Accordingly, a question arises as to what the relationship might be between these exigencies and the specific

⁷⁰ Sectional in the sense of being limited to the interests and aims of a particular group (Cambridge Dictionary).

discussions on subjectivity and objectivity in interpretation that have been current in contemporary theories on Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey? Moreover, if there is a relationship to be considered, then a follow-up question arises as to what degree this relationship is of consequence for the study of these Qur'anic theories?

While it might not be as obvious at face value, it is my claim that there is an innate relationship between both problems. In the next sections, I will first explicate this relationship by demonstrating a thematic connection between the problems of subjectivity and objectivity and the issue of perceived exigencies in ever-increasing sectional understandings of the Qur'an. Afterwards, I will conclude with a methodological proposition in which I suggest leveraging this thematic connection in order to efficaciously answer the question as to what the status of new and variant interpretations of the Qur'an is in contemporary Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics as exemplified by the works of Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Öztürk.

Subjectivity is usually associated with particularity, since the material cause of subjectivity, namely personality, is itself distinct and unique. Each subject has his or her distinct experiences, motivations, and sentiments. Hence, any process of interpretation that is consciously or unconsciously influenced by subjectivity, will inevitably also be just as unique, different, and particular as the person interpreting. Moreover, under the influence of subjectivity, understanding is bound to mutate over time, as new contexts, and thus, different subjectivities, arise that leave their unique imprint upon interpretations. Accordingly, any hermeneutical theory that is averse to the influence of subjectivity, will inevitably also disavow the legitimacy of new and unfamiliar readings of the Qur'an. On the other hand, a theory that constructively integrates the role of subjectivity within the process of interpretation, will maintain a more productive relationship towards differentiation and divergence within the ways in which the Qur'an is interpreted. In other words, the status of particular and context-driven readings of the Qur'an, is in essence answered by the question as to what degree the Qur'an can be read subjectively.

On the other hand, while subjectivity customarily relates to immanence, change, and divergence, objectivity relates to transcendence, persistence, and ipseity. A fact cannot be objective, unless it references a stable, subject-independent reality. Objectivity, as it is usually⁷¹ understood, revolves around a desire to bring something to the fore as it is “in-itself”—regardless of the subject that cognizes the thing in question. In the realm of interpretation, objectivity conventionally pertains to whether the interpreter has been successful in reconstructing the *mens auctoris*. The authorial intent, however, is a static fact bound to the moment in which a linguistic expression was formulated. It is for this reason recurrently identifiable. For example, when a spouse writes a note in order to instruct his or her partner to buy milk, there is no question that the intent embedded within the note is anything other than to instruct the recipient with buying milk. Every instance the author is asked for what their intention behind the note was, the answer will be to instruct the recipient with buying milk. Given such an understanding of objectivity, any theory that problematizes and foregrounds objectivity in method and understanding, will concomitantly emphasize a static understanding of the Qur’an. Moreover, an insistence on objectivity, will by extension stratify contradictory interpretations of the Qur’an into interpretations that are true and authentic to the text and interpretations that are false and disingenuous to the intentions of the text; for, in the context of objectivity, only one of the competing claims can be true and authentic to the text (one must buy milk and not (also) lemonade).

With these base characteristics of subjectivity and objectivity described, we can continue to explore their relevance as hermeneutical problems within the Turkish context. To recall prior discussions, Özsoy stated that the prominence of Qur’an studies and the subsequent proliferation of variant interpretations further escalated the need to resolve two hermeneutical problems: a shortage of ethical principles

⁷¹ As the Cambridge Dictionary defines it “the fact of being based on facts and not influenced by personal beliefs or feelings”. “Objectivity,” accessed March 20, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/objectivity>.

and a lack of method in Qur'an studies. Both of these problems are fundamentally related to the status of subjectivity vis-à-vis objectivity in the process of understanding and interpretation. Objectivity and method are interrelated subjects, since objectivity can only be warranted if there is a method that guarantees that something is cognized in statically recurrent ways. Without method, interpretation would run the risk of becoming volatile, and thus, uncontrolled. Hence, as it is customarily understood, method is expected to warrant impartiality when something is interpreted. For, the outcome of an interpretation is guided by an impersonal, mechanical procedure, namely method, rather than ever-changing subjective feelings and opinions. Similarly, the problem of ethics in the context of interpretation, is likewise entangled with the problems of subjectivity as well as objectivity. For starters, the bearer of moral scruples is the subject. Hence, any call to be more conscientious in regard to interpreting the Qur'an cannot transpire without explicitly and constructively involving subjective virtues. Moreover, whether an interpreter was truly disingenuous or not, can subsequently be tested by questioning if objective rules were followed, rather than subjective, prone-to-manipulation interests. Accordingly, a hermeneutical case can be made that the static character of objectivity reassures that certain interpretations are genuinely and honestly derived through an impartial reverence of certain methods, and not from the whims of the interpreter.

Given the fact that in Turkey each different stratum of civil society and academia has recently presented a distinct take on the Qur'an directed by their personal beliefs and motivations, it is only natural by virtue of their innate connection that the appreciation of such interpretations is settled by a theoretical valuation of subjectivity and objectivity in Turkish hermeneutical discourse. Accordingly, one of the most secure gateways to assert and comprehend the status of new and divergent explanations of the Qur'an in contemporary Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics, is by examining the various discussions on subjectivity and objectivity in interpretation that have become current in recent theories on Qur'an

hermeneutics in Turkey. As such, in complete correspondence with the character and context of the discourse studied, the first half of this thesis will be devoted to analysing each author's views on subjectivity and objectivity, while the latter part will be focused on comparing and analysing the various implications these views have for possibilities and limits of reading the Qur'an in new and distinct ways.

Re-examining Qur'an hermeneutics

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to introduce the problem of defining Qur'an hermeneutics, as it will have important consequences for the structure of the argument. To a certain extent, it seems incongruent to problematize a term after it has already been used in the course of the earlier sections. In previous sections Qur'an hermeneutics was described as a meta-level investigation into the problems of understanding the Qur'an, or with different words: the reflection upon the grounds and means upon which the understanding of the Qur'an ought to rely and proceed. However, this description was only meant to function on a proleptic level in order to redirect the focal point first to the context and the subject of the present thesis. There is still a need to further re-examine, and more importantly, arrive at a more scientifically secure understanding of hermeneutics and Qur'an hermeneutics due to the ambiguity and problems surrounding these terms.

Indeed, if there are any terms that need further re-examination and clarification, they are undoubtedly hermeneutics and Qur'an hermeneutics. The prior because of its particular history in western thinking in which its definition and development has traded many different hands, starting with the Attic Greek tradition all the way up to the Reformation and followed by German and French post-modern philosophy; thus, requiring elucidation as to which hermeneutics one is referring to.

Conversely, the latter has ironically not enough of a historicity to be familiar and matured in its meaning. The classical Islamicate languages as well as the major Western languages are – the last few decades withstanding - foreign to the word

'Qur'an hermeneutics'; resulting in the fact that Qur'an hermeneutics is without question a neologism. However, the etymology of this neologism is often left ambiguous: is it a make-shift linguistic equivalent (translation) of a classical Islamic concept, or is it an already familiar concept known in the Western intellectual tradition that has been reframed in relation to the Qur'an?

The answer to these questions will assuredly define the overall parameters of any subsequent inquiry into Qur'an hermeneutics, and must therefore be presented in advance in a clear and precise manner. For example, one of the current ways in which Qur'an hermeneutics is defined, is as a synonym for Qur'an interpretation, and thus, exegesis. However, as previously emphasized through the contextual analysis of recent discussions on the Qur'an in Turkey, the focal point of Turkish authors is to deliberate on the theoretical aspects of understanding the Qur'an, and not to actually produce a direct interpretation of the Qur'an. This has most eloquently been expressed by Şentürk in the following terms: "However, their [i.e. Ankara intellectuals] primary concern is to develop a new theoretical framework for the interpretation and application of Islamic sources. They believe that before turning to practical issues they need to justify their new ways of interpreting the Qur'an and the *hadith*."⁷² Accordingly, hermeneutics understood as exegesis is not a conducive means to analyse the recent contributions by Turkish intellectuals to philosophies of the Qur'an. Likewise, other current definitions of hermeneutics as rules of interpretation or deeper reading, are for their own reasons also inadequate representations of what hermeneutics signifies within the earlier described context of Turkish thinking. However, their particular shortcomings will be detailed in the next chapter.

⁷² Şentürk, "Islamic Reformist Discourses and Intellectuals in Turkey: Permanent Religion with Dynamic Law," 237.

Overall structure of thesis

In accordance with the earlier discussed topic, context, and method of research, the proceeding chapters will be organized according to the following structure.

The first chapter will aim at establishing the theoretical grounds upon which hermeneutics, and subsequently, Qur'an hermeneutics are defined. In this chapter I will reconsider some of the dominant ways in which Qur'an hermeneutics is defined and to what degree these popular conceptions are impertinent to a more philosophical understanding of hermeneutics requisite for a study of contemporary Turkish intellectual discourse.

Chapters two, three, and four will attempt at constructing an independent, basal narrative of each author's works. Accordingly, each author will be introduced in respect to the context of their work, followed by an analysis of their major views and arguments pertaining to the problem of subjectivity and objectivity in the context of Qur'an interpretation.

In the fifth chapter, however, a comparative analysis will be made of the arguments presented by the different authors that had previously been analysed independently from each other. This chapter will serve to draw out the predominant subthemes and shared sentiments by the different Turkish thinkers in order to gain a more comprehensive view of some of the general trends that are current within Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics.

The sixth chapter is where the fundamental implications of chapter five will be drawn in respect to the understanding of the status of new and variant interpretations of the Qur'an. This chapter will thus revert all the prior discussion back to their ultimate conclusions. In other words, to how the views on subjectivity

vis-à-vis objectivity in interpretation affect the terms for justified or illegitimate interpretations of the Qur'an that are new and different from previously familiar readings.

Finally, the last section of this thesis will be devoted to offering some final observations and remarks on the current status of Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey.

What is Qur'an hermeneutics?

Introduction

Neither hermeneutics nor Qur'an hermeneutics are - to borrow an expression from Foucault - a "tranquil locus on the basis of which other questions may be posed". Both terms are used and described in disparate ways by different disciplines and studies, and thus, run the risk of being misappropriated or misunderstood. Accordingly, the first and foremost task of research in Qur'an hermeneutics is to clarify what is meant by hermeneutics in a given research context, before actively using it as a theoretical frame of reference wherewith a specific problem is analysed.

Both classical and modern studies in hermeneutics have acknowledged the polyvalent character of hermeneutics. As early as the 19th century, Schleiermacher (d. 1834) concluded that there were multiple hermeneutics (*Hermeneutiken*) in circulation, and that hermeneutics was not a name that had been exactly specified (*genau fixierter Name*)⁷³. Likewise, Palmer describes various shifts in meaning that the term has undergone since the 17th century. Initially the term referred to the principles of biblical interpretation. At this time hermeneutics came to be especially relevant within Protestant circles, where the need for interpretative manuals of the Bible for ministers had increased after the rejection of the Church as the central authority on interpretation⁷⁴. It was not until the 19th century that hermeneutics transformed by the influence of Schleiermacher into a general science of all linguistic understanding⁷⁵. Hermeneutics was subsequently no longer conceptualized in regional terms, that is in the sense that it was confined to the problem of understanding a sacred or legal text. On the contrary, hermeneutics was

⁷³ F. D. E Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik Und Kritik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 75.

⁷⁴ Richard E Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 1st ed., Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Northwestern University Press, 1969), 34.

⁷⁵ Palmer, 40.

extended to the general problem of understanding more broadly beyond these specific applications⁷⁶. Finally, Palmer argues, that in the 20th and 21st century hermeneutics developed into two more directions: as a phenomenology of existence and of existential understanding, and the systems of interpretation, both recollective and iconoclastic, used by humans to reach the meaning behind myths and symbols.⁷⁷

The term Qur'an hermeneutics and its derivatives, on the other hand, do not fare any better in respect to having a univocal meaning. A cursory investigation of current literature demonstrates the vast disagreements between each author as to what Qur'an hermeneutics signifies.

In the *Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis*, Abdul-Raof identifies in passing hermeneutics simply as a translation of the classical Islamic notion of *tafsīr*.⁷⁸ As implied, Qur'an hermeneutics is considered synonymous to *tafsīr*, which is elsewhere defined by Abdul-Raof as "a literary activity whose function is the clarification of the theological, grammatical, semantic and historical aspects of the Scripture."⁷⁹

Hermeneutics and *tafsīr* are in this sense understood as the exegesis of the Qur'an, and have little to do with other well-known associations with hermeneutics, such as the investigation into the rules or method of interpretation.

McAuliffe, on the other hand, does associate Qur'an hermeneutics with the identification of various methods of interpretation. Cautioning against the misunderstood of hermeneutics caused by its divergent meanings, McAuliffe defines hermeneutics as "the enterprise which identified the principles and

⁷⁶ Paul. Ricoeur and John B Thompson, *Hermeneutics and the human sciences : essays on language, action, and interpretation* (Cambridge [England]; New York; Paris: Cambridge University Press ; Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'homme, 1981), 35.

⁷⁷ Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 33.

⁷⁸ Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, Reprint, Culture and Civilization in the Middle East (Routledge, 2013), 84.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 12

methods prerequisite to the interpretation of texts.⁸⁰ By observing that the tradition of *tafsīr* contains a similar enterprise ('parallel activity') to the abovementioned definition of hermeneutics, she equates this aspect of the tradition of *tafsīr* to what she calls 'Qur'anic hermeneutics'⁸¹. In this sense, unlike Abdul-Raof, McAuliffe is relating Qur'an hermeneutics to *tafsīr* not in relation to its quality as an exegetical activity but in relation to the fact that its tradition also exhibits the act of reflecting upon the fundamental principles and methods prerequisite to interpretation.

While previous authors saw *tafsīr* as somewhat synonymous with the notion of Qur'an hermeneutics, Campanini (d. 2020) outright rejects this equation. For Campanini hermeneutics revolves around the uncovering of the inner meaning. However, according to Campanini, *tafsīr* as "grammatical analysis or historical surveys of the prophets and kings" does not disclose any inner meaning of the text⁸². Hence, in respect to Campanini's argument, *tafsīr* cannot be called "a proper hermeneutics of the Qur'an"⁸³. Rather, it is the classical Islamic notion of *ta'wīl* that is properly hermeneutical as it "represents the process by which the exegete tries to seize the deep, innermost meaning of a verse without abdicating to literality."⁸⁴

Waardenburg further nuances the previously mentioned views by making an additional distinction between explicit and implicit hermeneutics. Waardenburg defines hermeneutics as the rules of interpretation, specifically in reference to sacred texts⁸⁵. Moreover, hermeneutics is either explicit or implicit. Whereas the

⁸⁰ Jane Dammen. McAuliffe, "Quranic Hermeneutics : The Views of Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Quran*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1988), 47.

⁸¹ McAuliffe, 47.

⁸² M Campanini, *Philosophical Perspectives on Modern Qur'ānic Exegesis: Key Paradigms and Concepts* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2016), 23.

⁸³ "The question in point here is that the genre *tafsīr* in Muslim literature cannot be considered a real 'hermeneutics'". Campanini, 23.

⁸⁴ Campanini, 24.

⁸⁵ Jean Jacques. Waardenburg, *Islam: Historical, Social and Political Perspectives* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2002), 111.

prior refers to the explicit formulation and conscious application of the earlier mentioned interpretation rules, the latter refers to rules derived ‘post factum’ by us the present-day researchers⁸⁶. Accordingly, like McAuliffe and Campanini, Waardenburg sets to inquire whether there is an analogue of either senses in the Islamic tradition of hermeneutics. Ultimately, Waardenburg draws, like the previous authors, another different conclusion about the status of hermeneutics in Islam by stating: “I am not sure if we can find in Muslim scholarship itself, outside Sūfī circles, a kind of *explicit* hermeneutics that clearly distinguishes different levels on which a text can be interpreted, such as was developed in the rabbinical and Christian theological traditions.”⁸⁷

Notwithstanding the fact that the previous definitions were adequate to the research contexts in which they were formulated, they are not entirely suitable to the works of the Turkish authors. Put differently, the previous definitions cannot be applied in a way that does justice to describing and understanding the nature of the works written by Cüendioğlu, Alpyağıl, or Öztürk. In subsequent sections, I will dive more extensively into this problem, but a few precursory examples can be presented that introduce and illustrate this issue further. For example, despite naming their projects hermeneutics (*hermenötik*)⁸⁸, neither Cüendioğlu nor Alpyağıl engage in providing an exegesis of the Qur’an, beside a few sporadic expressions. Thus, the equation of Qur’an hermeneutics with interpretation or the deeper reading of the Qur’an, as Abdul Raof and Campanini understood it, are by default not the kind of hermeneutics that Cüendioğlu and Alpyağıl have engaged in. Likewise,

⁸⁶ Waardenburg, 112.

⁸⁷ Waardenburg, 127.

⁸⁸ All three authors constructively engage with the term hermeneutics (*hermenötik*) and contemporary western discussions on the subject matter. Alpyağıl and Cüendioğlu go as far as to classify their works as an exercise or experiment in hermeneutics. However, not all contemporary Turkish intellectuals feel comfortable with this reliance on hermeneutics as they consider it to be foreign of origin. Ali Bulaç, for example, has stated that Muslim thinkers ought to first exhaust all their traditional means for interpreting the Qur’an before they venture out and resort to something as western hermeneutics. Ali Bulaç, “Kur’an’ı Okuma Biçimi Olarak Hermenötik,” *İslâmi Araştırmalar Dergisi* 9, no. 1-2-3-4 (1996): 117.

Alpyağıl and Öztürk have also reflected on the aesthetical and ethical dimensions of understanding, neither of which have directly anything to do with method or delineating the rules of interpretation. Accordingly, both Waardenburg and McAuliffe's definitions of Qur'an hermeneutics as the identification of the method and rules of interpretation, are also not entirely suited as a framing device wherewith the theories of the Turkish authors can be understood.

Conversely, if a definition of Qur'an hermeneutics is to be advanced that is capable of denoting the discourse formulated by the studied Turkish thinkers, it has to fulfil four base conditions. First, the proposed definition must acknowledge the ruminative and purely theoretical aspect of their thinking and be removed from the necessity of having to produce exegetical literature in order to be called hermeneutical. In other words, there has to be a clear separation between hermeneutics and commentary. Accordingly, a definition of hermeneutics must be proposed that is not attuned to exegetical questions, such as *what* the deeper meaning of the Qur'an is. On the contrary, a definition must be proposed that is attuned to philosophical questions, such as *whether* there is any deeper meaning, and to what degree and under which conditions this meaning is accessible.

Second, the proposed definition must have a history. It has to not only apply to the Turkish thinkers but also to traditional authorities that have inspired them or that they are challenging. Otherwise, it would lead to the inconsistency that we acknowledge the Turkish theories as Qur'an hermeneutics but not the source material and ideas upon which these ideas might be based. On the contrary, as I will demonstrate later, hermeneutics, and by extension Qur'an hermeneutics, are a cross-cultural discursive phenomenon that we can recognize to have existed prior to modernity in the larger Islamic intellectual tradition and that is still to varying degrees of effect in the thinking of the Turkish authors.

Third, the proposed definition must be divorced from the insistence of having to revolve around finding a method to interpretation or understanding, which is often the case when hermeneutics is defined as the method or rules of interpretation. Rather, as some of the Turkish thinkers would argue, not all understanding is incited or guaranteed by following a rational method. Accordingly, theoretical deliberations that describe the operations of understanding on purely existential grounds (e.g. through the influence of irrepressible cultural biases or God gifting understanding through faith) should also be taken seriously as being an exercise in hermeneutics—even if they do not fulfil a prevailing Cartesian urge to make interpretation and understanding methodical, systematic, or based on indubitable axioms.

Fourth, the proposed definition has to comprise a sufficiently universal idea of how Qur'an hermeneutics materializes. For example, is Qur'an hermeneutics only to be found in an aggregation of interpretation rules, in books bearing the title "Qur'an hermeneutics", or perhaps in scattered aphorisms? This problem of materiality is especially relevant, on account of how it defines where Qur'an hermeneutics can be localized and what the parameters are of the content examined when Qur'an hermeneutics is researched.

With these requirements considered, a pedantic definition of Qur'an hermeneutics will be unravelled in the next sections that describes Qur'an hermeneutics as "a contemplation on the operations and conditions in which the meanings of the Qur'an become intelligible, expressed at its lowest threshold in a statement".

The first part of this definition is aimed towards the abdication of hermeneutics from the necessity of method and production of exegesis. Accordingly, by emphasizing contemplation according to this new definition, the telos of Qur'an hermeneutics is shifted from the goal of producing an interpretation (exegesis) of the Qur'an and allowed to be primarily theoretical. Secondly, the mention of operations and conditions allows for hermeneutics to involve method but not

necessitate it; since, it also allows one to argue that the condition to understanding is not the systematic application of rules but other ideas or practices like faith or intuition. Finally, by noting the ‘intelligibility of meaning’ rather than exclusively mentioning interpretation, a space is cleared that allows for authors, such as Alpyağıl, to argue that not all meanings become intelligible (understood) through premeditated and contrived acts of interpretation.

The last segment of this definition, on the other hand, is primarily focused at delineating the material conditions of hermeneutics. Accordingly, by arguing that the lowest threshold is the statement rather than more complex entities such as a scientific system or method, another clearing is created for accepting a wide range of discourse as Qur’an hermeneutics that comprise discursive phenomena such as unfinished thought experiments, scattered aphorisms, and method independent ruminations. For, as we shall discover in the thesis, the hermeneutics of the Turkish thinkers are not complete scientific systems or methodologies. Their experiments in hermeneutics and the resulting statements are sometimes scattered and sometimes systematic, sometimes developed or revised in later works, but other times they have no theoretical continuation or epilogue. In other words, not all of their hermeneutical claims come together in a neatly planned and consistent scientific system of thought nor is it their intention to do so⁸⁹.

As a final note, it must also be recognized that this alternate definition of hermeneutics foregoes the requirement of self-designation, that is the need for a theory to be called “hermeneutics”; thereby opening a cross-cultural clearing for the term. In other words, an author could potentially call his or her discourse by other names, be foreign to the English designation of “Qur’an hermeneutics”, while according to this definition still engage in Qur’an hermeneutics. For, as I will argue, it is not a cultural designation, but the act of participating in the perennial

⁸⁹ For example, in the preface to his second work, Alpyağıl explicitly argues that his work is not intended to be systematic (*sistematik değildir*). Recep Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II* (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2009), 11.

discussion on the operations and conditions in which the meanings of the Qur'an become intelligible that makes something a Qur'an hermeneutics. Accordingly, whether an author has called his or her views an exercise in hermeneutics, does not stand in the way of these views being considered as hermeneutics.

To unravel this alternate definition of Qur'an hermeneutics, the following sections will be broken up into three linked theoretical excursions. The first excursion will pertain to a critical evaluation of some aspects of Körner's theory on what constitutes Qur'an hermeneutics in the larger Islamic tradition as well as the specific Turkish context. By re-examining part of Körner's views, I will further workout the urgency for a theoretical revision of Qur'an hermeneutics, and lay the groundwork for the earlier proposed alternate conception of Qur'an hermeneutics. The second excursion will build on these foundations by guiding the earlier findings into the uncovering of a cross-cultural conception of hermeneutics. At this point of this chapter, I will mainly engage with Heidegger's well-known reconceptualization of the hermeneutical circle found in Heidegger's *Being and Time* and his discussions on art. The third, and final excursion, will predominantly pertain towards the formal determination of the lowest material threshold in which hermeneutics can manifest itself. In other words, in the statement. This part will be led by helpful insights from Foucault on the phenomenon of statements as outlined in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

Hermeneutics beyond interpretation

One of the more extensive and noteworthy positions in recent research on the definition of Qur'an hermeneutics, especially within the context of this thesis, is found in Körner's study of revisionist Qur'an hermeneutics in the Turkish academic context. This study was already introduced in the previous chapter. However, besides presenting a pioneering overview of Turkish hermeneutical thought, Körner also presents notable ideas on how he understands hermeneutics within the

context of his research. Accordingly, there is not one definition of hermeneutics in Körner's work but a variety. Nevertheless, despite the diverse manners in which Körner understands and delineates the term, the overall ambitions of Körner's study are two-fold. First, to present a general account of hermeneutics that is of relevance within the grander narrative of the history of Muslim thinking. Two, advance a secondary, more restricted account of hermeneutics that wishes to stay true to the particularity of the contemporary Turkish works studied but simultaneously elevate the study on Qur'an hermeneutics to the level of contemporary western philosophical hermeneutics.

This ambition⁹⁰ notwithstanding, Körner's theoretical framework is not entirely precise in respect to the Turkish context on account of some inexact suppositions. Nevertheless, as one of the invaluable pioneering works within this field, further examination and challenging of these inexact suppositions will help to lay the groundworks for an alternative theory through which the problem of Qur'an hermeneutics will be addressed. By further outlining and challenging the presuppositions and ramifications of Körner's theoretical framework, I will lay the groundworks for an alternative theory where the problem of Qur'an hermeneutics will be addressed for the remainder of this chapter, and ultimately, this thesis.

Neutral and normative hermeneutics

Körner's definitions of hermeneutics are at their most fundamental level distinguishable into two classes: neutrally descriptive and normative. According to Körner, neutral hermeneutics signifies "what X does with the text"⁹¹. Furthermore,

⁹⁰ Körner who was very much familiar with the hermeneutical circle, knew that he too had his own prior suppositions, which he needed to explicate before advancing his study: "Reflecting on hermeneutics may however prove valuable not only because it clarifies a concept frequently used in this study. It may also help us to clarify the goals, chances and dangers of such a study. After all, this study certainly presupposes an *understanding* of the texts it deals with." Körner, "Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology : Rethinking Islam," 22.

⁹¹ Körner, 23.

we speak of “explicit hermeneutics” in the case of a person’s self-referential treatment of what they are going to do to the text, whereas in the case of describing what a person actually is doing to the text, we must speak of “implicit hermeneutics”⁹². On the other hand, the practice of normative hermeneutics is only reserved to thinkers that exhibit a proper historical consciousness⁹³.

Both of these classes have their distinct significances in Körner’s work. Accordingly, when hermeneutics is used in the neutrally descriptive sense, it can denote a wide range of discourse in Islam, since the only condition is for it to represent how Muslims “actually deal with the Koran”⁹⁴. Conversely, normative hermeneutics can only apply to a type of discourse that fulfils the prerequisite of being properly historically conscious. In other words, when the discourse in question possess:

“(a.) an awareness of the interpreter's pre-understanding, (b.) an awareness of the effects text and tradition have on the interpreter's pre-understanding, (c.) an awareness of the distance between text and interpreter, (d.) an awareness of the fact that text and interpreter are in principal confronted with the same reality and only see it from different perspectives, and (e.) an awareness of the therefore positive influence of this distance on the understanding.”⁹⁵

Despite being designated a neutral description and distinguished from normative hermeneutics, Körner’s neutral description is not without a degree of normativity. It is true that a prerequisite such as “what X does with the text” is more liberal than the earlier mentioned five conditions wherewith something becomes an expected (normative) kind of hermeneutics. However, this leniency notwithstanding, there is still a degree of normativity latent in this definition. First, there is a clear emphasis on the unidirectional relationship between the subject and the text, for it describes hermeneutics in terms of what X is doing to the text, rather than how X is affected by the text. Second, there is the clear reference to “doing”. In other words, for

⁹² “Here, it is helpful to distinguish between 'X's explicit' and 'X's implicit hermeneutics', i.e., what X says X does with the text-and what X *actually* does with the text”. Körner, 23.

⁹³ Körner, 32.

⁹⁴ Körner, 23–24.

⁹⁵ Körner, 32–33.

something to be hermeneutics it has to always be implicated in exercising a force of interpretation on the text. For example, by applying a premeditated interpretative method to the text.

If hermeneutics is by default, even in its neutral sense, predicated on the exercise of a unidirectional force from the subject, how are we to recognize theories that invert this relationship? For example, Alpyağıl argues that the Qur'an is not some black box whose secrets are waiting to be cracked open by interpretative instruments. On the contrary, Alpyağıl claims that the Qur'an can also force and understanding from the reader and that there are requirements to understanding the Qur'an that are more fundamental than method, such as faith and goodwill. Accordingly, by restricting the study of hermeneutics merely to theories that involve understanding through agency, we are excluding theories that are centred around the passive nature of understanding. Theories that might offer crucial and interesting insights on how an interpreter is enabled to understand the meanings of the Qur'an within sheer aesthetic and ontological parameters.

A branch of hermeneutics must not be confused with the class of hermeneutics itself. This judicious nuance seems to be present in other disciplines but sometimes lacks in the definitions of hermeneutics. For example, in the study of theology, dogmatic theology and liberation theology are not conflated with the base definition of theology itself but are rather recognized as different branches of theology—each with their own particular subtopic and methods. Similarly, at the base level, biology customarily constitutes the “study of living beings”. However, when the scope of biology becomes more restricted, it assumes such forms and extended designations as microbiology (study of living microscopic beings) or marine biology (study of beings that live in water). In no case, does an astute biologist conflate one of these branches with the definition of the base class itself. However, when it comes to hermeneutics or Qur'an hermeneutics, there is still little awareness or recognition of the intrinsically polyvalent character of both.

Accordingly, rather than recognizing that hermeneutics might have different inherent forms, and therefore, a need for secondary designations (e.g. methodological hermeneutics or ontological hermeneutics) to represent the full range of possibilities wherewith it discloses itself, each author is presenting an unqualified definition of hermeneutics. This leads to definitions that give an incomplete understanding of hermeneutics. For example, if we are to assume that the main question of hermeneutics is to understand how the meaning of things become accessed or disclosed to the interpreter, we would fall short of the theoretical possibilities in which this question can be answered by only restricting the inquiry to the contrivance of interpretative rules. There are other factors at play that might be just as important to answering this question, such as the theoretical structures of the influence of cultural biases (pre-understanding) or application of mystical practice (e.g. God gifting understanding through spiritual discipline) in the process of understanding.

For some that are still guided by a positivist understanding of the sciences, theorizing according to metaphysical, religious, or esoteric frames of references, rather than empirical and logical grounds, is both suspect and deliberately averted. However, there is still a great amount of classical and modern discourse that is willingly and knowingly theorizing about understanding according to non-positivist parameters. For example, the *muḥaddith*⁹⁶ Wakī' ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d. 812) records in a very early tradition how 'Umar – one of the closest companions of the Prophet - considered understanding to be God's gift and provenance. Accordingly, Wakī' reports that 'Umar wrote to another companion that "understanding is not received through seniority but through God's gift ('*atā allah*) and His provenance (*rizqahu*)."⁹⁷ Thus, as terse as this statement is, it harbours a very critical hermeneutical perspective on the fact that the advance of years does not by default bring with it understanding. On the contrary, understanding is gifted and provided

⁹⁶ Collector and expert of oral transmissions.

⁹⁷ Wakī' ibn Al-Jarrāḥ, *Kitāb Al-Zuhd* (Maktaba al-Dār al-Madīna al-Munawwara, 1984), 221.

by God. Moreover, it tethers understanding around a hierarchy of the elect and non-elect: principally, anyone can become a senior, but not everyone is by default benefitted by God with understanding. Rather, as the Prophet Muhammad has argued in this regard, God has to choose to be beneficent towards that person: “For whomever Allah wants good, he gives him understanding in the religion”⁹⁸.

Furthermore, since understanding is in this frame of reference granted by God and God’s beneficence is bound to supplication, it follows that understanding can be something prayed for. This is clearly evidenced by Muhammad’s request to God on behalf of his cousin Ibn Abbas: “My God, make him gain understanding of religion and teach him the interpretation.”⁹⁹

It must be clear now that understanding can be achieved passively or through agency. In the context of this thesis, I will refer to the latter explicitly as interpretation. Interpretation, in this sense, leads by default to a different understanding of something or perhaps a more complete or deepened understanding of something. For example, a person might understand the central theme of a film in a certain way based on the *prima facie* sentiments evoked by the film. As such, that person might come to a wholly different or deeper understanding of the film once he or she consciously applies a secondary, more deliberate analysis to the film. In other words, when he or she tries to unravel the deeper themes not through direct intuition but through contrivance. However, not all understanding is contrived, for there are also certain experiences in which understanding occurs without being effected by the deliberate and wilful acts of an interpretive subject. For example, one might hear a Psalm or a verse of the Qur’an completely out of historical and textual context but find a deep resonance in what is expressed in these media and understand its significance directly and intuitively from their own

⁹⁸ Abū ‘Īsā Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā ibn Sawra Al-Tirmidhī, *English Translation of Jāmi` At-Tirmidī*, trans. Abu Khaliyl, vol. 5 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 50.

⁹⁹ Yusuf Sıdkî El-Mardinî, *Mesîru Umûmi’l-Muvahhidîn Şerh U Terceme-İ Kitâb-i İhyâu Ulûmi’d-Dîn: İhyâ Tercüme Ve Şerhi*, vol. 3 (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2016), 257.

life experiences, rather than through contrived historical, philological, or thematic analyses.

It is important to distinguish between two degrees of interpretation: immediate and contrived. In this thesis, the term interpretation is mainly reserved to denote the latter. These two degrees of interpretation are better articulated by Heidegger's distinction between *Auslegung* and *Interpretierung*. In English the dictionary equivalent of these terms is interpretation, but in German, these two terms have a distinct denomination. As Heidegger explains, *Auslegung* is our direct apprehension of things. For example, when I enter into a workbench, the object on the table is apprehended by me without deliberation *as* a hammer. However, a member of another culture that has different associations with this object might apprehend it intuitively *as* something different. Thus, despite being a direct and intuitive experience of understanding, this apprehension-as still involves a degree of interpretation in the sense of relating to known cultural symbols. *Interpretierung*, on the other hand, is as Heidegger puts it "thematized, discursive articulation and theorization"¹⁰⁰. Or as Caputo further elaborates, *Interpretierung* is "is the way understanding gets developed, filled in, articulated."¹⁰¹ Hence, to recapitulate, I will regard the apprehension of something as something, understanding, whereas interpretation will be mainly used to denote the thematic, discursive development of our initial apprehensions¹⁰².

If we neglect to separate hermeneutics from the sense of *Interpretierung*, we might come to expect more from the works of certain thinkers, than we ought to. In such an instance, we will accordingly hit a similar wall as Körner did: "But how can one study Koran hermeneutics, and then complain that what one has found is only

¹⁰⁰ David. Hoy, "Heidegger and the Hermeneutic Turn," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 181.

¹⁰¹ John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 69.

¹⁰² I wish to also remark that this conceptual scheme is additionally wholly compatible with its Turkish equivalents *anlama* (understanding) and *yorumlama* (interpretation) used by the Turkish thinkers.

hermeneutics?”¹⁰³ The answer to this question, is quite clear. Körner believes that “the Koran is ready to rethink the whole world”¹⁰⁴, and was hoping that the Turkish authors would realize this potential. However, such an expectancy is misplaced. Hermeneutics, as demonstrated, does not necessarily need to be productive in the sense of being involved in an act that manufactures understanding at will. The Turkish thinkers did rethink something, but this was not, as Körner had hoped, new solutions to our understanding of the whole world. Rather, the Turkish thinkers, as Körner’s study a fortiori confirmed, rethought what is implicated in thinking about the Qur’an. Rather than hastily providing new interpretations about the Qur’an, the Turkish thinkers first asked what is at all involved in understanding the Qur’an?

Such a misplaced expectancy would also distort the conclusions of this thesis as soon as we start to discuss the first author, Cüendioğlu. In the very first pages of his first work on hermeneutics, Cüendioğlu argues that his project is specifically designed to inquire into the being (*mahiyet*) of understanding (*anlama*)¹⁰⁵ and interpretation (*yorumlama*)¹⁰⁶. Moreover, not only to inquire into the question *how* something should be understood but *why* it should at all be understood that way¹⁰⁷. In other words, Cüendioğlu’s work already announces itself ahead of time as engaging in a hermeneutics that also theorises aspects of understanding that involve no interpretation in the exegetical sense whatsoever. Accordingly, to truly accommodate Cüendioğlu’s hermeneutics, it is important to analyse it with preconceptions that are able to understand his work for what it is, rather than with preconceptions that are skewed and ultimately fail to become fulfilled by the expectancy of meaning that they incorrectly project.

¹⁰³ Körner, “Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology : Rethinking Islam,” 205.

¹⁰⁴ Körner, 205.

¹⁰⁵ The fact that Cüendioğlu inquires into the ‘mahiyet’ of understanding as well as interpretation, already demonstrates that his work differentiates – as I do – between understanding and interpretation. Moreover, Cüendioğlu wonders in both cases about the essence, as demonstrated by ‘mahiyet’, and therefore, about the theoretical being of understanding and interpretation.

¹⁰⁶ Dücane Cüendioğlu, *Kur’an’ı Anlama’nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I* (Istanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 2005), 15.

¹⁰⁷ Cüendioğlu, 15.

We must thus abstract away the problem of hermeneutics from the issue of intentional and laborious interpretation. This is but the first step of developing an applicable definition of Qur'an hermeneutics. There are still additional issues left - as alluded to in the earlier sections of this chapter - which pertain to the delimitation of the historicity of this term and its potential relationship to western philosophical hermeneutics. These issues also surface and become addressed to a degree by Körner in his second, normative definition of hermeneutics. However, similar to his neutral description of hermeneutics, Körner's normative description of hermeneutics is also open to question.

It is true that in delineating the normative description, Körner has relinquished any claim to neutrality, as the normative description identifies an object as hermeneutics when it fulfils the specific parameters of historical consciousness in regard to understanding. This, in itself, is not problematic. Rather, the real problem is to be discovered in the theoretical implications that suggest historical examples of Qur'an hermeneutics to be irrelevant in modern hermeneutical discussions. This exclusion creates a theoretical framework wherewith the hermeneutical projects of the Turkish thinkers are de-historicized, that is considered to originate in the present, rather continue from the past. Accordingly, a theoretical rift is imagined between contemporary Turkish thinkers and their historical predecessors by virtue of the prior's unique hypothetical ability to answer "the challenges of contemporary hermeneutic reflection"¹⁰⁸. However, I will challenge these implications in the next section by arguing that there is a description of hermeneutics possible, and necessary for that matter, that allows for Qur'an hermeneutics, even in its classical expressions, to participate in some of the modern hermeneutical discussions that took shape post-Schleiermacher. However, before I can advance into the proposed solution, I will have to further delineate the problem, as outlined in the work of

¹⁰⁸ Körner, "Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology : Rethinking Islam," 47.

Körner, to better understand the stakes surrounding such a solution as well as the solution itself.

As stated, there is an intrinsic de-historicizing tendency at work in Körner's normative understanding of hermeneutics that regards the classical Islamic tradition as devoid of a proper historical consciousness, and therefore, unsuitable of being referred to as hermeneutics in such a sense. The fact that classical Islamic hermeneutics considers revelation to have been occasioned by specific historical events (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), does not deter Körner from making this observation¹⁰⁹, since for Körner historical consciousness is more than the awareness of context dependence. Rather, to be properly historically conscious means to also be aware of such elements as the effects text and tradition have on the interpreter's pre-understanding¹¹⁰.

Since other indicators in Körner's work demonstrate that the normative description of hermeneutics is closely connected to the philosophical tradition of hermeneutics as exemplified by the continuous reference to modern authors such as Gadamer, this presupposition implies that pre-modern hermeneutics in Islam belongs to a markedly different order of discourse than contemporary western discussions of hermeneutics. This presupposition concerning classical Qur'an hermeneutics, is what renews the lease on Körner's ultimate question: "How hermeneutical is Islam?"¹¹¹. A question, that would be nonsensical if there was no assumed rupture between pre-modern Qur'an hermeneutics and modern hermeneutics, since Islam, as Körner admits, possess already "an old tradition of 'explicit hermeneutics'"¹¹². Nevertheless, this old tradition is only hermeneutical in the neutrally descriptive sense, and not according to the proposed normative sense. It is only on account of the evolution in our understanding of hermeneutics, which its modern normative

¹⁰⁹ Körner, 32.

¹¹⁰ Körner, 33.

¹¹¹ Körner, 33.

¹¹² Körner, 32.

sense inhibits, that we may ask again how hermeneutical Islam is. As such, modern works alone are eligible discussion partners, since their prospective potential to exhibit a proper historical consciousness remains open-ended until such a question is affirmatively answered—unlike classical hermeneutics where the question has already been dismissed by Körner.

Moving forward with this hypothetical expectancy, Körner surveys extant literature on different modern hermeneutical theories of the Qur'an. Körner concludes the following:

“The extant maps cover the aspect of historical awareness in Muslim Koran interpretation. It is precisely because of this coverage that we can say with relative certainty that what has been produced in the mapped areas does not meet all challenges of contemporary hermeneutic reflection yet.”¹¹³

Authors such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010) and Fazlur Rahman, might be aware of the distance between text and interpreter, but for Körner they still lack a proper sense of the positive role that distance can play in the process of understanding. Moreover, despite the awareness of distance, an analysis of the interpreters' pre-understandings or that the point of understanding is not to try to slip into the author's mind, remains still to be discovered in the works of these authors¹¹⁴.

With other modern authors written off, Körner depends on the Turkish authors of his study for answering whether there is finally a Qur'an hermeneutics among Muslims that meets all the “challenges of contemporary hermeneutic reflection”¹¹⁵. In the final chapter of his work, Körner relates to what degree the Turkish authors were capable of responding to these challenges. As for his final verdict, Körner remains undecided. Körner does recognise some features of modern hermeneutical theories to be either explicitly, or in some cases, implicitly present, such as the

¹¹³ Körner, 47.

¹¹⁴ Körner, 47.

¹¹⁵ Körner, 47.

interpreter having an awareness of: (1) his own pre-understanding and values¹¹⁶, (2) of the fundamental distance between the Qur'an and present-day readers, and (3) of the fact that this distance has a positive influence on interpretation¹¹⁷. However, the productive potential of the latter is not made fully conscious, which leads to these thinkers to overlook the fact that "with the new perspectives we have gained, the Koran can be heard to say things that were previously impossible to hear."¹¹⁸ Moreover, a fundamental feature of modern hermeneutics that is still missing in these theories, is the potential awareness "that the views of a reader today are already depending on the text-plus-tradition before they start asking questions."¹¹⁹

While Körner's assessment is not incorrect on all fronts, there is an important contradiction overlooked by Körner that I claim bring parts of his method into question. This contradiction is evident in the fact that Körner is fully aware of the presence of some modern hermeneutical suppositions in Turkish thinking, even to the extent that some of these are directly influenced by Gadamer¹²⁰, yet does not question why it is that Turkish authors chose to specifically adopt some of these suppositions while departing from others. In other words, why did the Turkish authors desist from explicitly arguing that the distance to the text is a productive means of understanding, as well as refrain from allowing the Qur'an "to say things that were previously impossible to hear"? To argue that the Turkish thinkers coincidentally omitted these themes of modern hermeneutics in their own thinking, would certainly be plausible if we knew for sure that the Turkish thinkers were not read in modern theories on hermeneutics. However, according to Körner's own account, Turkish thinkers inhibit "a vital interest in contemporary thought"¹²¹. An interest, that has, according to Körner, resulted in a 'cross-fertilization' wherein Western philosophers "can observe their own tradition being used in a new

¹¹⁶ Körner, 203.

¹¹⁷ Körner, 203.

¹¹⁸ Körner, 203.

¹¹⁹ Körner, 203.

¹²⁰ Körner, 24.

¹²¹ Körner, 205.

framework of questions”¹²². Accordingly, the fact that the Turkish authors chose not to integrate certain modern hermeneutical suppositions into their thinking, despite being aware of these suppositions, leads us to conclude that the Turkish thinkers had other deliberations that hindered the integration of these suppositions into their own thinking.

If it is not contemporary hermeneutical thought where these deliberations are derived, since they contradict contemporary hermeneutical thinking, then it must be another source. This source, is more likely classical Islamic thinking than the author’s own private musings, given the fact that all of the thinkers exhibit the same pattern¹²³, and that similar hermeneutical reservations can also be discovered in classical Islamic thinking—the very tradition that the Turkish thinkers have been born and educated into. These conventional reservations prioritize proximity over distance in the context of understanding and secure the surplus of meaning to historical references.

One traditional example that is especially relevant in the Turkish context¹²⁴ of how historical distance is considered to deter understanding, and the fact that the strongest references employed within the context of understanding are more historically ancient references, is found in the distinction that the classical scholar al-Māturīdī (d. 944) makes between *ta’wīl* and *tafsīr*. *Ta’wīl* and *tafsīr* are both considered by al-Matūrīdī to be statements indicating the meanings of the Qur’an. However, whereas *tafsīr* comprises statements expressed with great certainty, *ta’wīl* comprises speculative statements. To express certainty concerning the meanings of the Qur’an, requires one to have witnessed the event concomitant to

¹²² Felix Körner, “Turkish Theology Meets European Philosophy: Emilio Betti, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur in Muslim Thinking,” *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 62, no. 2/4 (2006): 809.

¹²³ Körner studied four thinkers belonging to the same context, with all four of them – despite being hermeneutically trained - having the same result in respect to the missing hermeneutical features Körner was so insisted on finding.

¹²⁴ By virtue of the fact that al-Matūrīdī was a 9th century Islamic theologian who founded the eponymous Matūrīdī school of theology, which subsequently become endorsed and promulgated within the Ottoman empire.

revelation (*al-amr nazala fīhi al-qur'ān*)¹²⁵. Only through direct witnessing can one claim to possess knowledge (*'ilm*) of the real intent (*ḥaqīqat al-murād*) deposited by God within a verse¹²⁶. As such, understanding with certainty is only possible by the companions of the Prophet, as they were first-hand witnesses of the revelation. Later generations, as exemplified by al-Māturīdī's reference to jurists (*al-fuqāha*)¹²⁷, can only produce new statements concerning the Qur'an that are speculative in nature, since they have to rely on the linguistic possibilities of the text, rather than their direct personal experience of revelation. In other words, later generations cannot generate a *tafsīr* but only a *ta'wīl* of the Qur'an¹²⁸. Moreover, the closer one is to the event of revelation, the more valuable – epistemologically speaking – one's interpretative statements are concerning the Qur'an.

Classical Muslim scholars were keenly aware of the historicity of understanding by virtue of a lot of different markers. For example, Ibn Khaldūn argued that the development and turn to the philological sciences in *tafsīr* was spurred on account of a historical loss of linguistic competence (*malaka*)¹²⁹. In other words, whereas the Prophet's contemporaries had a rich knowledge of the literary aspects of Arabic, over time this knowledge was forgotten¹³⁰, thereby forcing later generations to rely on books written by linguistics in order to regain this knowledge and facilitate their understanding of the Qur'an. Accordingly, classical scholars came to recognize a difference between the understanding of the Prophet's companions and subsequent generations. This is further evidenced by the complex epistemological systems found in various Islamic disciplines, such as *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, and *tafsīr* that grade knowledge in relation to whether this knowledge stems from the Prophet, his companions, or the latter's students, also known as 'the Followers' (*tābī'ūn*). Entire sections and works, such as the *Tabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn*, have been dedicated to

¹²⁵ Abū Maṣṣūr Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Dār al-Mizān, 2005), 3.

¹²⁶ Al-Māturīdī, 1:3.

¹²⁷ "Ta'wīl belongs to the jurists (*wa al-ta'wīl li al-fuqāha*)". Al-Māturīdī, 1:3.

¹²⁸ This inevitably also explains why al-Māturīdī, since he was not a companion, named his work to be *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, rather than *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*

¹²⁹ Abū Zayd 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima* (al-Dār al-Tunisiyya li al-Nashr, 1984), 532.

¹³⁰ Khaldūn, 532.

delineating hierarchies of authority concerning interpretative statements. Hierarchies that are grounded in the principle that understanding is directed by one's societal and historical position, such as whether one was born during or post-revelation of the Qur'an.

In the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, this historical consciousness has also resulted in the recognition and development of new interpretative techniques. To recall the words of the Ottoman jurist Büyük Haydar Efendi (d. 1903):

“After the age of the Prophet (*ahd-i nübüvvet*) the [continuation of the] address of the Maker of the Sharī'a (*Shāri'*) became naturally no longer possible, and revelation stopped (*münkati'*). However, with the renewal (*teceddüd*) of time and circumstances (*vukuat*), an additional two other references [for the Sharī'a] were needed. [In other words] the rulings of the Sharī'a needed to be established by consensus (*ijma'*) and analogy (*kıyas*).”¹³¹

In other words, with the discontinuation of revelation, the Sunni Islamic community knew they no longer had the means to directly learn how their ever-changing milieu was appreciated by God. As a result, Muslim intellectual leaders had to resort to two different techniques by which they could justify addressing new situations in a manner that was in line with God's intentions. In the first place they resorted to consensus. For, the Prophet had argued that the majority of his community would not collectively mistake themselves¹³². Furthermore, they also resorted to analogy, that is to finding rules for new issues by relating them to similar rulings that do have an explicit text in the accepted sources. Put differently, unlike the companions, newer generations could not ask the Prophet directly for the status of such matters as marihuana, organ donation, or cultured meat but have to assert this based on

¹³¹ Büyük Haydar Efendi, *Usul-i Fıkıh Dersleri* (Istanbul: Meral Yayınları, n.d.), 334.

¹³² Efendi, 334. While Büyük Haydar Efendi cites the words of the Prophet as “My community will not (*lā*) unite on misguidance”, this report can be retraced to the collection of Ibn Mājah (book 36, ḥadīth 3950) where the Arabic states “Never (*lan*) will my community unite on misguidance”. Ibn Mājah, *English Translation of Sunan Ibn Mājah*, ed. Huda Khattab, trans. Nasiruddin Al-Khattab, vol. 5 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 174–75.

analogical cases. Understanding, as later thinkers recognized, changes thus from witness and audience to inference for succeeding generations.

With such examples in mind, we must recognize that tradition has already something – explicitly or implicitly - to say about the matters that we might think are relatively new discussions in hermeneutics. This is strongly vindicated by how much inspiration modern Muslim thinkers derive from classical thinkers when they address contemporary hermeneutical problems. For example, Cündioğlu, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter, supports his own hermeneutical claims with insights garnered from the well-known Mu'tazilī author Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), thus demonstrating that there are relevant insights to be found in classical thinking for present-day hermeneutics. Another example can be given from how one of the more well-known contemporary scholars of Islamic hermeneutics, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010), was by his own admission deeply influenced in his hermeneutical insights by the ideas of the medieval Sufi Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240). Abu Zayd even argued that there was an overlap between the inquiries of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240), Heidegger and Gadamer¹³³. Thus, it seems by all accounts that we must desist from hastily discarding classical hermeneutical theories within Islam, and regard them as irrelevant for the discussions held by contemporary philosophical hermeneutics.

Researchers who assume from the onset that certain hermeneutical questions have not been answered by classical thinkers, are bound to impede themselves from grasping the full genealogical depths of modern Muslim hermeneutical discourse. To borrow a Gadamerian concept, modern Muslim thinkers, such as the Turkish authors of this thesis, are in their consciousness effected by history. In other words, before they venture into contemporary hermeneutical debates, such as how we should understand the historicity of our understanding in the interpretative

¹³³ Ahmad Hissou and Stefan Weidner, "Interview Mit Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid," 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120527153920/http://www.nefais.net/2010/07/06/interview-abu-zaid/>.

process, they already carry prejudices and presuppositions inherited from the discursive traditions of *kalām*, *fiqh*, *tasawwuf*, *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and so forth. They do not leave these prejudices at the door and then venture into the aforementioned discussions. On the contrary, their thought is at every turn a dialectics between the traditional and the contemporary. In the words of Wilkinson, "Turkish theology needs to be read not through the lens of reductive dualities but to be understood in terms of its complex dialectical relations between intellectual traditions."¹³⁴ Hence, to reiterate, if we forego this awareness of how history is already effective in present-day thinking, we lose the means wherewith we are able to explain why certain theoretical choices are made by Turkish thinkers. The questions one asks and the answers one formulates, hence, what one assimilated into one's understanding, is dependent on the structure of the pre-given horizon, such as inherited, classical hermeneutical prejudices, wherefrom such questions are asked. To neglect to inquire into this structure, means to neglect to understand why and how Turkish hermeneutics develops as it does.

All these reflections inspired by Körner's research, thus lead to the conclusion that a more applicable understanding of hermeneutics, especially in the context of Turkish thinking, has to fulfil two conditions. First, it has to transcend the requirement of volition and agency, since there is a range of hermeneutical discourse that also pertains to the sheer ontological and aesthetical dimensions of understanding. Second, it has to apply to classical as well as modern Islamic discourse, in order to not impede any potential genealogical understanding of the ideas expressed by modern thinkers.

Cross-cultural hermeneutics

If the previous section demonstrated anything, it is the fact that hermeneutics needs to be defined carefully, as certain definitions can hinder and restrict us from

¹³⁴ Wilkinson, "Dialectics Not Dualities: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue," 326.

seeing the entire field of possibilities in which hermeneutics can manifest itself. For example, a definition of hermeneutics that centres around method, will become inattentive of unmethodical theories of understanding. Accordingly, we can already intuit that a definition is not merely something that communicates to us what a thing is in itself but also, as I will elaborate in the next sections, where to localise and recognise the thing's presence.

Each of the previously discussed definitions of hermeneutics, did not only define the *what* of hermeneutics but also the *where*. For starters, when we conflate hermeneutics with exegesis as Abdul-Raof did, we shall only discover hermeneutics in exegetical literature, such as *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, and not encyclopaedic and propaedeutic works, such as the literature on the '*ulūm al-qur'ān* (sciences of the Qur'an). Since the latter contains ancillary discussions to exegesis, such as what the definition and rules of exegesis are but not the exegesis of the Qur'an itself. Likewise, two of the Turkish authors of the present thesis, will for that matter also be not recognised in engaging with hermeneutics, given the fact that their works have little to do with practicing exegesis. However, if we are to argue that hermeneutics revolves around the rules of interpretation, as Waardenburg did, we will generally only be able to study the aforementioned '*ulūm al-qur'ān* and not *tafsīr*. Finally, if we are to understand hermeneutics as the disclosure of a deeper sense as Campanini did, we will not be able to discover hermeneutics in the previously mentioned literature on the '*ulūm al-qur'ān* but also not in all kinds of *tafsīr*¹³⁵ as Abdul-Raof's more general definition did permit. Thus, there is no doubt that whatever we intent by hermeneutics, will have a fundamental impact on what we are subsequently permitted to categorise and analyse as hermeneutical discourse.

¹³⁵ Only works of *tafsīr* that delve into the deeper (*bāṭin*) meanings of the Qur'an will become eligible, not the common works of *tafsīr*, as Campanini had already argued, that restrict their inquiry to historical and philological dimensions of the Qur'an.

Definitions regulate and organise the analytical process of discourse. Accordingly, there is nothing left but to acknowledge that if a definition wishes to be as true as possible to the discourse that it helps to analyse, it must be somewhat informed by this discourse. This, accordingly, introduces a degree of circularity, which has inevitably been the main theme of this chapter. However, rather than to argue against this circular approach, I will in the next sections, in the vein of early Heidegger, expound upon the necessity involved in entering this circle correctly, and further embrace it in order to gain a productive footing for defining what Qur'an hermeneutics is.

The circularity of understanding

To answer the question of what art is, Heidegger noted he had to begin at the place where art 'essentially unfolds', that is the work of art¹³⁶. Yet, this involves, as Heidegger rightfully noted, a circularity in method: "What art is should be inferable from the work. What the work of art is we can come to know only from the essence of art. Anyone can easily see that we are moving in a circle."¹³⁷ Attempting to escape this circularity by arguing that we can derive what art is from prior principles, is only a superficial solution. Since, we cannot derive what art is from prior principles, without again having an already familiar understanding of art that gives us the ability to recognise that these principles pertain to what art is¹³⁸. We are therefore, as Heidegger concludes, compelled to follow the circle if we at all wish to know what the essence of art is ¹³⁹.

The validity of this method, often referred to as the hermeneutical circle in secondary literature, has been a recurrent theme within the discussions of

¹³⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 144.

¹³⁷ Heidegger, 144.

¹³⁸ Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art"* (n.p.: Springer, 2009), 66.

¹³⁹ Heidegger, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, 144.

Heidegger's earlier works. Heidegger was not only confronted with the previously mentioned circularity in method, in the question of art, but also in respect to the question of being. In the case of *Being and Time*, Heidegger argued that we as humans were capable of inquiring into being as well as interpret its significance, because of our understanding of being that we had garnered in advance by already being acquainted and involved in being, that is by existing. In both studies Heidegger was fundamentally aware that "according to the most elementary rules of logic, this *circle* is a *circulus vitiosus*"¹⁴⁰ and that "ordinary understanding demands that this circle be avoided because it violates logic".¹⁴¹ Yet, Heidegger did not only persist in arguing the necessity of this method but also that it is productive to our understanding of things: "In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing."¹⁴²

To better understand this context wherein our knowledge of something can only correctly advance by holding our prior familiarity anew against the thing inquired, we need to delve a little deeper into the Heideggerian concept of 'fore-structures'. Let us recall the earlier discussion on how understanding is always an apprehension of something *as* something. However, for Heidegger such an understanding always needs presuppositions in order to get underway¹⁴³. In other words, without our presuppositions that form the background of all our understanding, we would never have 'a context of intelligibility'¹⁴⁴ in which we could understand things. Accordingly, as Heidegger argues, our understanding is dependent upon a fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-concept. For example, when one beholds a hammer in a workbench, one does so against the totality of possible practices involved. In other words, the hammer is always appreciated in light of an advanced grasp (fore-having) of the whole situation of possible practices surrounding the hammer¹⁴⁵. On

¹⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 194.

¹⁴¹ Heidegger, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, 144.

¹⁴² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 2001, 195.

¹⁴³ Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*, 72.

¹⁴⁴ Hoy, "Heidegger and the Hermeneutic Turn," 182.

¹⁴⁵ Hoy, 190.

the other hand, in order to make a particular feature of something explicit, we need to be able to “see in advance the appropriate way in which things can appear”¹⁴⁶, which is fore-sight. For example, a sociologist looks at human beings in terms of the expectancy of seeing social behaviour¹⁴⁷, while an economist might expect to see economic relations. Finally, we can only interpret things in accordance with the concepts that we have at our predisposal (fore-concept). As Inwood states, “I can see something as an implement, but not as a violin if I lack the concept of a violin.”¹⁴⁸

If an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us¹⁴⁹, we must concern ourselves not with ridding ourselves of our presuppositions, or naively deny their effects on the process of understanding; rather, we must try to work out our presuppositions in terms of the things themselves. In other words, to allow the circularity of our understanding to function constructively, we must understand “that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.”¹⁵⁰ Ultimately, as Heidegger concludes: “What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way”¹⁵¹.

After conceding to the necessity of a circularity in method, thus by acknowledging the necessity to start with a piece of art in order to uncover what art is, Heidegger was able to direct his interpretative gaze on Van Gogh’s *A Pair of Shoes* and unfold the essence of art as “the truth of beings setting itself to work”¹⁵². Accordingly, Van Gogh’s painting does more than show a pair of shoes by also, for example,

¹⁴⁶ Hoy, 190.

¹⁴⁷ Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 107.

¹⁴⁸ Inwood, 107.

¹⁴⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 2001, 191–92.

¹⁵⁰ Heidegger, 195.

¹⁵¹ Heidegger, 195.

¹⁵² Heidegger, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, 162.

disclosing to us an “uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death.”¹⁵³ This aspect of Van Gogh’s work is what makes the work in question ultimately art, i.e. the ability to make the onlooker experience the disclosure of what the pair of shoes are *in* truth. An aspect that might have been intuited by our preunderstanding of art, but now, thanks to Heidegger, has been thematically and discursively articulated in interpretation.

In like manner, to uncover firstly what Qur’an hermeneutics is, we must also start with the venues that are usually recognised or expected to manifest to us the presence of Qur’an hermeneutics. However, before we are able to do so, we must ask ourselves what these venues are. For example, is a theory of Qur’an hermeneutics only discovered in a system of rules that are rigorously based on indubitable axioms? Or, can Qur’an hermeneutics for that matter, also manifest itself in loose, unconnected observations? Moreover, the prior seems to suggest that a complete Qur’an hermeneutics will more likely manifest itself in a larger work, such as a book, but not in a shorter form of discourse, such as a pamphlet or epistle. Inevitably, as it has been recurrently thematised in this chapter, we are already in possession of a preunderstanding (popular conceptions), concerning what the sites are in which Qur’an hermeneutics manifests itself. Accordingly, in the next section I will address some of the more pertinent examples of certain popular conceptions as to where the sites are at which we can discover Qur’an hermeneutics, as well as my own hypotheses. Consequently, after ascertaining the sites of Qur’an hermeneutics, I will further advance into bringing the circle to an end by distilling from these sites the definition of Qur’an hermeneutics.

For starters, one might expect the site for hermeneutics, and by extension Qur’an hermeneutics, to be only found at the locale that is self-aware and self-identifying

¹⁵³ Heidegger, 159.

with these terms. However, is it necessary, for example, that an author classifies his own work in a certain manner, for that work to belong to a particular genre of discourse or discussion? For example, Mustafa Öztürk, the last author of this thesis, speaks little if at all of hermeneutics in his own work, let alone in speaking of, i.e. identifying, his own work as hermeneutics. Yet, does this preclude the fact that his work is not through and through hermeneutical? Can we not discover Qur'an hermeneutics in discourse identified otherwise, such as with works that identify themselves as "a theory of interpretation", "principles of understanding", "reading method of the Qur'an", "rules of exegesis", "*uṣūl al-tafsīr*", and so forth? Put metaphorically, is it possible to meaningfully and authentically identify something as something in the absence of its signpost, or for that matter, in contradiction to its own signpost?

To explore this question, let us start with a self-evident premise that will function as a subsequent reference. In other words, let us start with a work of hermeneutics that is self-aware of being hermeneutical at all levels of its texture. A work that has both a reference to hermeneutics in its title, and self-reflexively partakes in discussing what hermeneutics is by someone who is considered to be an authority on the subject matter. The work in question is Dilthey's *The Rise of Hermeneutics*. In this essay, Dilthey argues that "hermeneutics derives the possibility of universally valid interpretation from analyzing [sic] Understanding in general"¹⁵⁴. Thus, as we fixate on this statement, we can infer that hermeneutics involves - at its very core – the analysis of understanding in general. In other words, hermeneutics involves the analysis of general understanding before it is applied to specific kinds of understanding, such as the understanding of law or scripture.

With this reference in mind, we can now divert our attention to a work of logic; a work, that at first sight, belongs to another genre. This work in question is titled *The*

¹⁵⁴ Wilhelm Dilthey and Frederic Jameson, "The Rise of Hermeneutics," *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 233.

Principles of Understanding: An Introduction to Logic from the Standpoint of Personal Idealism. Neither in the title nor in the body, does this work contain any reference to the term hermeneutics. The author, Henry Sturt, argues that he is well aware of the fact that logic is usually defined as the theory of forms of argument. However, Sturt sees this definition as pertaining to a ‘subordinate interest’. Rather, as Sturt argues: “Logic should be defined as the theory of understanding”¹⁵⁵. Does this accordingly mean that the “the whole of understanding comes within the purview of the logician”¹⁵⁶? According to Sturt it does, even in “spite of the weight of authority”¹⁵⁷ against him. As such, despite being a work of logic, Sturt’s treatise studies various aspects of understanding, such as ‘the facts of understanding’ or ‘functions of understanding’, as well as various kinds of understanding, such as our ordinary, everyday understanding¹⁵⁸.

Now, given our tentative reference to hermeneutics as being fundamentally involved in analysing understanding in general, does it not mean that Sturt’s work of logic that theorises understanding in a general manner is also a work of hermeneutics, despite having no mention of hermeneutics whatsoever? Moreover, if we were to further probe this assertion, do we not further discover a similarity in Sturt’s interest in everyday understanding and that of Heidegger? If we are able to recognise the latter as a theory of hermeneutics, as the secondary literature on Heidegger often does, then we must inevitably also recognise Sturt’s theory of logic as a theory of hermeneutics. In other words, if the example of Sturt has shown anything, it is the fact that hermeneutics can be discovered where there is no self-recognition or self-identification with hermeneutics. What is more, one could even discover the presence of hermeneutics in spite of a work’s self-classification, as we had discovered in the example of Sturt, who classified his work as a work of logic and not hermeneutics.

¹⁵⁵ Henry Sturt, *The Principles of Understanding: An Introduction to Logic from the Standpoint of Personal Idealism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 1.

¹⁵⁶ Sturt, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Sturt, 4.

¹⁵⁸ That is, “the intellectual process which we exhibit in our conduct from hour to hour”. Sturt, 1.

The aforementioned example allows us to discover the presence of hermeneutics as a type of discourse, despite the absence of hermeneutics in the orthographical sense, that is without discovering the word hermeneutics mentioned within this discourse. This fact inevitably opens the possibility to discover the presence of hermeneutics at other cultural sites that are foreign to the word hermeneutics. Nevertheless, to discover how far this possibility goes, so that we may relate it to a Qur'an hermeneutics, we need to first delve into a conventional perspective wherewith hermeneutics is delineated in reference to its historical particularity. In other words, to examine whether hermeneutics is a type of discourse whose production hinges on a particular historicity, or whether it is possible to conceptualise hermeneutics independently of this particular history.

Now then, the prevailing historical narrative concerning hermeneutics, traces the development of hermeneutics from its origins in Ancient Greece through Protestant theology and Romanticist philosophy. Thus, we are told that "like almost every persistent and important problem in the West, hermeneutics can be traced back to the Greeks and in particular to the rise of Greek philosophy"¹⁵⁹. Accordingly, the term hermeneutics has its origins in the Greek root of *hermeneuein*, which in its most general sense, means to interpret. However, in more concrete everyday usage, we discover two derivative references to *hermeneuein*. The first pertains to Hermes, the messenger of the Gods, who brings a word from "the realm of the wordless", and the second to *hermeios*, the priest who interprets the sayings of the Oracle of Delphi¹⁶⁰. Nevertheless, following the post-Hellenic era, hermeneutics received a second significance and evolved into the specific science of the method of interpreting Christian scripture. Similar to its Greek origins, hermeneutics in this secondary sense, was also related to making a divine word intelligible¹⁶¹. This

¹⁵⁹ Don Ihde, *Expanding Hermeneutics: Visualism in Science*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 9.

¹⁶⁰ Ihde, 9.

¹⁶¹ Ihde, 10.

concern to bring the divine word to better intelligibility, became renewed with the movement of Protestantism and its call to reinterpret scripture in accordance with itself, unfettered and undistorted by tradition. It was not until the nineteenth century, when the previously mentioned narrow sense of hermeneutics was spurred by post-Enlightenment rationalism to accommodate the wider universal claims of scientific criticism, that hermeneutics evolved into its contemporary sense¹⁶². In other words, it was at this moment in history when hermeneutics became a philosophical concern that interests itself with the theory of understanding in general, rather than the specific application of understanding to particular texts. An accomplishment usually credited to the great Protestant and Romantic thinker Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (d. 1834).

The prior history of hermeneutics has also been reframed by Ricoeur in terms of 'deregionalisation'. To elaborate, Ricoeur differentiates between regional and general hermeneutics. Whereas regional hermeneutics pertains to hermeneutics in relation to a specific domain, such as Bible hermeneutics, general hermeneutics concerns itself with the universal problem of understanding. Accordingly, by looking at the history of hermeneutics we discover various degrees wherein hermeneutics became deregionalised. The first 'real movement of deregionalisation' begins according to Ricoeur with the earlier mentioned Schleiermacher. Before Schleiermacher hermeneutics concerned itself on the one hand with a philology of classical texts, and on the other hand with the exegesis of the Old and New Testaments. After Schleiermacher, hermeneutics was forged anew on the requirement "that the interpreter rise above the particular applications and discern the operations which are common to the two great branches of hermeneutics"¹⁶³. However, as Ricoeur argues, the deregionalisation of hermeneutics could not be pressed to the end, until the epistemological concern for a more extensive universality was to be subordinated to a more fundamental ontological concern. In

¹⁶² Ihde, 11.

¹⁶³ Paul. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. John B Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 5.

other words, deregionalisation reaches its apex at the moment “understanding ceases to appear as a simple *mode of knowing* in order to become a *way of being* and a way of relating to beings and to being”¹⁶⁴. This evolution in hermeneutics, as Ricoeur has noted, took place in the post-Romanticist hermeneutical works of Heidegger and Gadamer, in which hermeneutics is elevated to a more radical enterprise by becoming not only general but thanks to its ontological preoccupations, also fundamental¹⁶⁵.

Given the particularity of the actors involved and the uniqueness of certain events, in the formation and evolution of hermeneutics, it is only natural to assume that hermeneutics itself is bound specifically to certain historical and cultural constraints. The history of hermeneutics is predicated on unique events. Hermeneutics in the classical, regional, as well as its contemporary, general (epistemological) and fundamental (ontological) senses, seems to be indebted for its grounds and content to events that are specific to the west, such as Reformation theology, post-Enlightenment epistemologies, and contemporary German ontological thinking. Dilthey’s undeniable contribution to the deregionalisation of hermeneutics, was for that matter motivated by his conscious desire to mimic Kant by writing a critique of historical reason, similar to how the latter had written a critique of the experiential knowledge of the natural sciences¹⁶⁶. As such, given this unique historicity, must we not surrender to the inescapable foreign nature of hermeneutics when we relate it to other non-western traditions such as classical Islamic thinking? With the unassailability of philosophical (general) hermeneutics being a western invention, may we at best hope to speak of a hermeneutics only in the regional sense in the case of the history of Islamicate societies, since there are obviously traditions found in classical Islam that resemble the regional character of Bible hermeneutics?

¹⁶⁴ Ricoeur, 4.

¹⁶⁵ Ricoeur, 4.

¹⁶⁶ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2006), 215.

While such rhetoric appears to be appealing, I will not affirm its conclusions. On the contrary, unlike existent theories and previously stated hypotheses, my thesis will be that hermeneutics is in none of its earlier discussed regional, general, and fundamental senses foreign to classical and contemporary thinking in historically Islamicate contexts.

In respect to the general and fundamental senses of hermeneutics, this conclusion needs little evidence where contemporary thinking is concerned. For, we can discover in the open Schleiermacher and Dilthey being discussed and endorsed by a Mustafa Öztürk, or Betti's general, Romanticist hermeneutics being preferred by Fazlur Rahman in favour of Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics. The ingress of general and fundamental hermeneutics in modern Muslim discourse is only to be expected, given the fact that the previously mentioned authors have either studied at western universities or at native universities that were modelled to resemble western universities. Accordingly, by virtue of academic exchange, hermeneutics in the general and fundamental sense has inevitably made its way into the discourse of certain contemporary Muslim thinkers.

On the other hand, by continuing this theme of intellectual exchange, it is also possible to discover hermeneutics in its various senses in classical Muslim discourse. For example, Gilliot states, "Although *tafsīr* with no other qualification refers in most cases to a qur'ānic interpretation or commentary, its origin is not Arabic."¹⁶⁷ Rather, the term is speculated to be borrowed, either from Christian or Jewish sources. If this holds true, then hermeneutics and *tafsīr*, as they both spring from Christian sources, must thus already be intrinsically related in their essence. Likewise, if we were to move our attention from its Christian origins to the Hellenic character of hermeneutics, it is a historical fact that Ancient Greek works made

¹⁶⁷ Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval," Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān, Qur'ānic Studies Online (Brill, n.d.), https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00058.

their way very early into Islamic thinking, to become further interpreted and worked out by Muslims intellectuals. As such, we can discover that early Muslim thinkers were already acquainted through the Greek-Arabic translation movement with the various derivatives of the Greek *hermeneuein*. Among the more pertinent derivatives, we inevitably discover Aristotle's work *Peri Hermeneias*. The 10th century scribe Ibn Nadīm (d. 998), reports that this work of Aristotle was very early made available in Arabic as *Bārī Armīniyās* by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 910)¹⁶⁸. Following its translation, *Peri Hermeneias* was subsequently abridged by al-Kindī (d. 873) and Averroes (d. 1198), provided with a commentary by al-Fārābī (d. 951), and reworked by Avicenna (d. 1037) into *Kitāb al-'Ibarāh*. Thus, if Ihde is right about the fact that the general philosophical sense of hermeneutics hearkens back to Ancient Greek philosophy¹⁶⁹, and that *Peri Hermeneias* belongs to an intellectual moment of self-conscious, philosophical theorising of hermeneutics¹⁷⁰, we must conclude that Muslim thinking has already an acquaintance with hermeneutics on a philosophical level that goes back to more than a millennium ago.

Yet, we can wonder whether it is possible to think of the cross-cultural presence of hermeneutics in Islamicate discourse beyond the limits of appropriation – even if we have already gone beyond earlier discussed theories on hermeneutics in Islam by meting out to this appropriation an aged existence? It is at this junction, that I wish to further extend my earlier thesis by arguing that hermeneutics is not an appropriated concept but a transcultural, discursive practice that can independently come, and has come for that matter, into existence in various cultures at different points in time. This practice I refer to, however, is not random, and does have certain conditions. The most important conditions, which I shall discuss shortly, pertains to theoretical reflectivity and discursive materialization – both of which will be explained in due course.

¹⁶⁸ Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Ishāq Al-Nadīm, *Al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 358.

¹⁶⁹ Ihde, *Expanding Hermeneutics: Visualism in Science*, 11.

¹⁷⁰ Ihde, 9.

To reframe hermeneutics in these terms, we must firstly reread the history of hermeneutics not in terms of a linear actualization, wherein hermeneutics has truly come into a different being in modern times by producing newer, universal and fundamental senses, but rather in terms of having already actualized its various senses in pre-modernity. Such a reading of hermeneutics has already been to some degree advanced by certain researchers. Palmer, for example, argues, that the modern definitions of hermeneutics emphasize a different direction of an already latent, “rich reservoir of meaning resident in the Greek roots”, and that the field of hermeneutics would do well to return to this rich reservoir¹⁷¹. However, those who are familiar with the works of Heidegger and Gadamer, know that these two exemplars that are credited with bringing hermeneutics in recent times to a more fundamental, ontological sense, were in fact already consciously returning to the ‘rich reservoir’ of Greek thinking. Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, for example, is a very conscious effort to undo the Cartesian legacy on our thinking of being and return to the Ancient Greek way of thinking about being. Gadamer was likewise influenced by the Ancient Greeks and chose to consciously build his hermeneutics around such concepts as Aristotle’s *phronesis* and Plato’s dialectics. Moreover, as Ihde argues, both Schleiermacher and Dilthey, the actualizers of the deregionalisation movement of hermeneutics, were in fact also returning “the sense of hermeneutics to its more general ancient philosophical sense”, while -naturally - also “giving hermeneutics somewhat of a specific shape”¹⁷². By these tokens, it seems that hermeneutics was not abducted in the recent history of western thinking from a primordial regional significance into its general and fundamental significance but actually brought back into its general and fundamental significance.

Hermeneutics, as I interpret it from all of the earlier reflections, is rooted in an event wherein human beings bring the problem of understanding into theoretical reflexivity. In the perennial questioning of how the meaning of something,

¹⁷¹ Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 31–32.

¹⁷² Ihde, *Expanding Hermeneutics: Visualism in Science*, 11.

whatever that thing may be, becomes intelligible to any intelligent being. Ultimately the birth of hermeneutics lies in this event, and not in, as I have demonstrated earlier, the conscious application of a certain lexical term or the relation to specific historical figures and movements. Accordingly, to the extent that any culture has some tangible proof that documents this event, we are able to recognize the presence of a hermeneutics in that culture. Hermeneutics, in the philosophical sense, should by this account be no longer considered in mere Eurocentric terms. Moreover, since hermeneutics is on a cultural level bound to an event, which itself can develop a particular historicity, it means that there is neither one culture nor history of hermeneutics but a multiplicity of hermeneutics and histories of hermeneutics. Some histories even, as we demonstrated earlier, intersecting at various points in time.

To make an additional point about the cross-cultural presence of hermeneutics, it is my contention that if the various, transhistorical and transcultural monuments of hermeneutical thinking, i.e. written hermeneutical discourses, demonstrate anything, it is the fact that there have also been various fields, genres, and works wherein it is difficult to clearly demarcate and uncover only one sense wherein hermeneutics operates. Rather, upon closer inspection, one uncovers the synchronous presence of multiple senses of hermeneutics, that is regional, general, or fundamental; sometimes even in one single work. Thus, if the history of hermeneutical discourse demonstrates anything, it is not always that hermeneutics developed in terms of a linear progression wherein one sense of hermeneutics sublates a previous sense, as was the case in recent western hermeneutical discourse, but also that different kinds of hermeneutics were developed synchronously; whereby concurrent senses of hermeneutics could even inform each other.

Illustrating this latter claim further, is perhaps best done in reference to the concept of the active intellect as developed by the classical Muslim philosophers. This

concept serves as the foundational explanation as to how humans can at all comprehend anything, including the meaning of things¹⁷³. As the argument goes, anything potential cannot be actualized by itself, and is in need of an external, already actualized cause, for its own actualization. Therefore, the human, *material intellect*, cannot come to cognize any potential meanings unless it is with the aid of the external *active intellect* who has already an actualized possession of these meanings¹⁷⁴. Accordingly, up to this point, the discourse on the active intellect informs us of a general theory of understanding that all humans partake in, and answers thereby how it is at all possible that humans understand anything. However, the active intellect itself receives its fundamental ontological significance, by ultimately emanating from God. As Salim states:

“As the highest point above the Active Intellect, God, the pure intellect, is also the highest object of human knowledge. All sense experience, logic and the faculties of the human soul are therefore directed at grasping the fundamental structure of reality as it emanates from that source and, through various levels of being down to the Active Intellect, becomes available to human thought through reason or, in the case of prophets, intuition. By this conception, then, there is a close relation between logic, thought, experience, the grasp of the ultimate structure of reality and an understanding of God.”¹⁷⁵

Accordingly, at this crossing within overall the discourse on the active intellect, we are inevitably met with a theory of understanding, that has significant and deep ontological preoccupations. Finally, the overall discourse on the active intellect goes into its regional hermeneutical significance, thereby becoming constitutive of a proper theological or Qur'an hermeneutics when it becomes the framework wherewith the possibility and the operations of prophecy and revelation are explained. For example, Avicenna argued that a prophet has a special, immediate

¹⁷³ On a side note, comprehension, is always a comprehension-of, and the word that we can discover in the writings of the Muslim philosophers to describe the object of comprehension is *al-ma'ānī*, which is also the word that denotes 'meanings' in every day and technical usage.

¹⁷⁴ Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 315.

¹⁷⁵ Kemal Salim, "Ibn Sina, Abu 'Ali Al-Husayn (980–1037)," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Genealogy to Iqbal*, ed. E Craig, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Routledge, 1998), 650.

relationship with the Active Intellect, thereby allowing him to be privy to a special form of cognizance, that is revelation¹⁷⁶.

Related to the latter, is inevitably another intersection where the general theory of understanding synchronously crosses a regional theory of understanding. This intersection can be found in the general epistemological differentiation between the various levels of understanding that Muslim philosophers made, which subsequently also informed their Qur'an hermeneutics. For starters, al-Fārābī makes the most generic statement possible concerning understanding by saying, "And the understanding of anything is brought into realisation in either of two ways (*wa tafhīm al-shay' 'alā ḍarbayn*)."¹⁷⁷ Firstly, by causing a thing's essence to be perceived by the intellect, or secondly, by causing the thing to be imagined through a similitude¹⁷⁸. Whereas the first kind of understanding is actualized through the methods and discipline of philosophy reserved for the elect, al-Fārābī argues that the second kind of understanding is mediated by religion and pertains to all the masses¹⁷⁹. Thus, in religion, rather than finding abstract problems such as nothingness being discussed in their naked theoretical immediacy, one discovers another more accessible method, which is by speaking of approximative symbols, e.g. darkness as symbolic reference for nothingness¹⁸⁰. Since revelation is part of religion, it must therefore mean that the Qur'an is also composed of approximative symbols meant to instruct the masses.

While, al-Fārābī lays the groundwork for a regional theory of understanding, respectively a Qur'an hermeneutics, through his general theory of understanding,

¹⁷⁶ Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, 4th ed. (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 34–35; Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect*, 340.

¹⁷⁷ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Abū Naṣr Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl Al-Sa'ādah*, ed. Ali Bu Milhim (Beirut: Dār wa maktabah al-Hilāl, 1990), 88.

¹⁷⁸ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Abū Naṣr Al-Fārābī, *Al-Farabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 44.

¹⁷⁹ Al-Fārābī, 45–45.

¹⁸⁰ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb Taḥṣīl Al-Sa'ādah*, 90.

he does so only on an implicit level. A more explicit theory, however, can be discovered in the works of Avicenna and Averroes, who bring the presuppositions of al-Fārābī directly into relationship with the Qur'an. Thus, we discover that Avicenna claims that the Qur'an wittingly speaks of God in anthropomorphic terms, in favour of abstract theoretical terms. If the Qur'an had done otherwise, argues Avicenna, the 'bedouin [sic] Arabs or crude Hebrews' would think that "the belief they were being invited was belief in an absolute nonentity".¹⁸¹ Accordingly, since the Qur'an contains symbolic truth catered to the masses, it is possible through interpretation to revert these symbols into their underlying scientific truth¹⁸². However, this is a task only reserved to the wise and learned. On the other hand, Averroes who also followed suit with similar general hermeneutical suppositions as al-Fārābī and Avicenna¹⁸³, relates the problem of understanding through demonstration versus understanding through symbols, to the fundamental issue of truth. The resolution to this theme ultimately characterises Averroes' explicit theory of Qur'an hermeneutics. Thus, Averroes argues that the Qur'an and the discursive philosophical tradition based on demonstration, both contain truth, and "truth does not contradict the truth but, rather, confirms and testifies to it"¹⁸⁴. Accordingly, in case our understanding of something derived from demonstrative evidence contradicts our understanding derived from scripture, we must try to reconcile both sources of information by reinterpreting the latter¹⁸⁵.

The concurrent presence and entwinement between general and regional hermeneutics, was not only exclusive to the works of the philosophers but can also be found in the *uṣūl al-fiqh* tradition. In his work on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, which I will

¹⁸¹ Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, 42.

¹⁸² Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 152.

¹⁸³ "Scripture contains literal and esoteric statements because human nature and disposition vary in respect of assent". Muhammad Ibn-'Abd-al-Malik. Ibn-Tufayl and Averroes., *Two Andalusian Philosophers : The Story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan by Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Tufayl & the Definitive Statement by Abu'l Walid Muhammad Ibn Rushd*, trans. Jim Colville (London: Kegan Paul, 1999), 82.

¹⁸⁴ Ibn-Tufayl and Averroes., 81.

¹⁸⁵ Ibn-Tufayl and Averroes., 81.

purposefully leave untranslated in order to not force certain preconceived notions into its discussion¹⁸⁶, the Ḥanafī jurist al-Sarakhsī (d. 1090) dedicates an entire subsection (*faṣl*) to the problem of elucidating the manner in which absolute statements signify meanings (“*ibānat tarīq al-murād bi mutlaq al-kalām*”)¹⁸⁷. Accordingly, we are met with a section that is but one of the different places wherein al-Sarakhsī makes statements that pertain to a universal, linguistic understanding, demonstrating thereby the undeniable presence of a general hermeneutics in his works. However, since the Qur’an is also a linguistic expression, these insights also characterize and are further supplemented by al-Sarakhsī’s regional, scoped hermeneutics of the Qur’an. Moreover, because the Qur’an discloses God’s binding address to humankind (*taklīf*), which is the subject of *fiqh*, al-Sarakhsī inevitably also engages in another regional hermeneutics, i.e. of the Law (*sharī’a*). Thus, where we can really see this entwinement come to fruition, is for example in the discussion concerning directives (*al-amr*) where we are first met with an inquiry into how the universal, phenomenological essence of a directive should be understood, subsequently with how the specific directives of the Qur’an should be understood, and finally how one is to relate the prior understandings to a jurisprudential understanding (*fiqh*) of the Law.

To return to the question of what Qur’an hermeneutics is. It is my claim that the *differentia* of Qur’an hermeneutics can be recognised through the earlier mentioned concurrent interplay between the various senses of hermeneutics. Accordingly, when we recall the prior examples among the Muslim philosophers and jurists, we discover the presence of hermeneutical statements that might advance our knowledge of how understanding operates on a universal level but say little of what is particularly and exactly involved in understanding the Qur’an. Conversely, we might discover hermeneutical statements within the works of the

¹⁸⁶ For example, by referring to it as ‘theory of jurisprudence’, thereby losing a terminological relationship to hermeneutics.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Sarakhsī Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī Sahl Abū Bakr, *Uṣūl Al-Sarakhsī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), 153.

philosophers and jurists that inform us specifically of the conditions or operations involved in understanding the Qur'an, which are not pertinent on a universal level, and therefore, inapplicable in relation to other entities than the Qur'an.

Accordingly, while I will refer to the prior theoretical undertaking as hermeneutics in the absolute sense, the latter is what I will call Qur'an hermeneutics. In other words, the qualifier of 'Qur'an' in Qur'an hermeneutics, denotes only the particularity and exactitude wherewith the general hermeneutical task of reflecting on how the meaning of things become intelligible is further constricted and derivatively developed. In other words, by specifically theorising how the particular meanings of the Qur'an become intelligible. Such an understanding of Qur'an hermeneutics is inevitably regional in character. However, this regionality, as previously discussed, is a matter of scope, not a matter of being culture-specific in respect to concepts (e.g. *tafsīr*), historical movements, genre of works (e.g. *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *'ulūm al-qur'ān*), or authors. Qur'an hermeneutics is therefore in the absolute sense not the exclusive possession of Muslims or their history. Massimo Campanini's *Philosophical Perspectives on Modern Qur'anic Exegesis* is for this reason no less a 'proper work' of Qur'an hermeneutics, than Averroes' *Fasl al-Maqāl*¹⁸⁸.

Qur'an hermeneutics and the statement

In the course of receiving their final abstract sense, both hermeneutics and Qur'an hermeneutics were discussed in the previous sections in relation to different media, e.g. works, discourse, genres, and statements. While the problem of materiality was announced and thematised earlier, among others in reference to the circular approach wherewith the apprehension of a thing's essence is sought to through the site at which it manifests itself; a formal conclusion concerning the materiality of Qur'an hermeneutics has yet to be drawn. Accordingly, in this final section, I will

¹⁸⁸ All the more evidenced by the fact that Campanini imports the discussions of Averroes into his own work.

focus on bringing the material aspects of Qur'an hermeneutics to a formal conclusion, since it has important consequences for how Qur'an hermeneutics is conclusively defined and studied within this thesis.

Let us begin with the self-evident premise that the reflective event that is Qur'an hermeneutics, always intersects with thought. However, unless the thinking that is Qur'an hermeneutics is externalised in a material form that is persistent and recurrently accessible, we have no ways of studying such thinking. Hypothetically speaking, it is quite possible for there to have been various hermeneutics of the Qur'an that have been lost to the sands of time. Either because these theories were privately held, they were shared orally without ever being written down, or they were simply lost, because their manuscripts have been either hidden or destroyed. Such theories cannot become in any case a subject of a study, for there is nothing to analyse. Thus, the only sensible way to discursively inquire into the problem of Qur'an hermeneutics, is by attending to material records that we can persistently call upon to disclose us the thinking that is Qur'an hermeneutics.

With this in mind, we discover that certain conventional assumptions, as the previous sections demonstrated, extend this premise by defining the materiality of Qur'an hermeneutics in terms of a specific form of writing, e.g. the formulation of rules (Waardenburg). However, as the history of hermeneutics suggests, this expectancy seems more likely to be a bias inherited from theology and post-enlightenment empiricism. The quest for rules is synonymous to the desire of method, the know-how wherewith assertions can become elevated to the level of universal validity. However, as the history of the Reformation and Enlightenment demonstrates, such a quest is fundamentally motivated by certain dogmatic and positivist aspirations. In other words, in the aspirations to claim that one's religious interpretations hold truer than the claims of other religious groups (e.g. Protestantism versus Catholicism), or that one is scientifically secure and rigorous in their truth claims. However, not all understanding of hermeneutics was pursued

with such consequences in mind. Admittedly, the question of how the meaning of something becomes intelligible, can potentially be answered through methodological conditions by delineating certain rules or other kinds of preparations, such as a particular spiritual discipline. Moreover, such an answer can accordingly become prescriptive, tradition, and even scientifically objective (repeatable). But, as we argued earlier, it is not *necessary* for hermeneutics to present an answer that pertains only to method. For, to ask this question again, what is to deter one from fixating on understanding in passive terms, i.e. understanding that has not been manufactured procedurally and wittingly? What about understanding received through the poetics of revelation or through divine provenance? In such cases, is it not possible to investigate the essence of understanding in reference to a poetics or theology of the gift without involving the apologetic or scientific problem of method? The history of Islamic discourse confirms such a possibility, since we discover authors like Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) explicitly relating in their hermeneutical frameworks understanding to God's provenance (*rizq*)¹⁸⁹. Accordingly, we must conclude that the requirement for method, expressed for example in the material structures of rules, is not a necessary material condition for the existence of Qur'an hermeneutics.

Another temptation would be to pursue the necessary material characteristic of Qur'an hermeneutics in the unity of the book. Speaking of 'a book of Qur'an hermeneutics', seems to be an enticing and stable foundation to formalise the material aspects of Qur'an hermeneutics. One could thus study Qur'an hermeneutics in a very straight-forward manner by locating, organising, and analysing such books of Qur'an hermeneutics. However, on closer inspection, we can quickly discover that the book (or *kitāb*) as the material condition for Qur'an hermeneutics provides only a naïve and superficial solution to the problem. For starters, in classical Islamic literature the understanding of the Qur'an is not only

¹⁸⁹ Yusuf Sıdkî El-Mardinî, *Mesîru Umûmî'l-Muvahhidîn Şerh U Terceme-î Kitâb-i İhyâu Ulûmî'd-Dîn: İhyâ Tercüme Ve Şerhi*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2016), 491.

theorised in books but also epistles (*rasā'il*), fatwas, in the marginalia of commentaries and meta-commentaries, and even what some have referred to as novels. To give an example of the latter, we can refer to the tale *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, written by Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185). Not only is Davidson able to read a theory on understanding from this tale but also relate it to hermeneutical theories that we know to be expressed in other written media: “But Ibn Tufail, in contrast to Ghazali, apparently does attempt to go beyond Avicenna in ranking direct experience above discursive thought as the preferable road to human understanding.”¹⁹⁰

Furthermore, as evidenced by the recent participation of academia in the field of Qur'an hermeneutics, the types of written media wherein we can discover Qur'an hermeneutics has become extended beyond the media known to classical Islamic traditions. Accordingly, we now also find Qur'an hermeneutics in published monographs based on theses, essays, conference proceedings, interviews, and so forth. Thus, by all accounts, the book as the necessary material condition of a Qur'an hermeneutics, does little justice to the many forms in which Qur'an hermeneutics manifests itself.

A final temptation, based on the discussion above, would be to secure the materiality of Qur'an hermeneutics to the phenomenon of the work. In other words, while the earlier mentioned media, such as epistles, essays, and novels, are inherently different, they are still at their very core works. However, this avenue proves ultimately to also be too constrictive. For, the work assumes too great a unity that is not present in some of the places we can also discover Qur'an hermeneutics. For example, there are sections that pertain to Qur'an hermeneutics in works devoted to other topics, or perhaps the author is only mentioning a few, although very important, statements on what is involved in understanding the Qur'an. Such statements might furthermore be even dispersed, not in only one single work but over a multitude of works. The Muslim philosophers who are a clear

¹⁹⁰ Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect*, 180.

example of the latter, have their entire hermeneutical outlook dispensed in statements that are dispersed over a variety of previously mentioned media. The great classical reference works of Qur'an hermeneutics developed by al-Zarkashī (d. 1392) and al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505), are very much predicated on collecting and sometimes analysing dispersed statements of Qur'an hermeneutics. This – sometimes - sporadic presence of Qur'an hermeneutics, might delude some to believe that there is no intricate, explicit hermeneutics to be found. However, this is only a superficial perspective on the matter. This would for example be tantamount to arguing that Ibn 'Arabī, one of the most influential and brilliant Sufis of the Islamic tradition, had no deep knowledge of what is involved in our understanding of the Qur'an, merely because he speaks about the understanding of the Qur'an in a dispersed fashion, rather than by dedicating a single treatise to a solemn, unified exposition of his theory of Qur'an hermeneutics as we are accustomed with modern monographs on hermeneutics. Thus, all things considered, we must seek the necessary material conditions in a different measure than the work. A measure that allow us to also discover Qur'an hermeneutics in dispersion.

It is at this cross-section that I wish to draw partial theoretical support from Foucault's understanding of the statement in order to come to a formal conclusion concerning the necessary material condition of Qur'an hermeneutics. In other words, to argue that at its lowest limit, thereby at its necessary level, Qur'an hermeneutics can be found in the statement. It is of note, as I will soon explain the rationale behind this, that I am wittingly speaking of a statement in reference to Qur'an hermeneutics at its most fundamental level, and not the more accustomed lower unities of sentence or proposition.

Let me advance the discussion with the premise that the statement provides unique features whose awareness force a level of discernment that is otherwise missing in relation to propositions or sentences. For starters, as Foucault demonstrates, one could discover in 'No one heard' and 'It is true that no one heard' one proposition,

but two different statements. These sentences are from a logical view, i.e. a propositional standpoint, identical, since they represent the same state of affairs. However, in respect to their nature as statements “these two formations are not equivalent or interchangeable. They cannot occupy the same place on the plane of discourse, nor can they belong to exactly the same group of statements.”¹⁹¹ For example, ‘No one heard’ could be spoken by an author or a character within a novel, while ‘It is true that no one heard’ could be discovered in an interior monologue or a silent discussion with oneself¹⁹². Likewise, identical sentences could be repeated on the same ink, paper, and position, yet still constitute two different statements¹⁹³. Webb presents an example of such an instance by arguing that “when the line “Le sommeil est plein de miracles!” appears in the 1868 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, it is a new statement when compared to the same line in the 1861 edition, since Baudelaire died in 1867, making the later edition “posthumous and placing it in a different institutional and economic set of relations.”¹⁹⁴ In other words, the second time that the sentence “Le sommeil est plein de miracles ”(Sleep is full of miracles!) appears, it becomes a statement to some readers on Baudelaire’s own death on account of the metaphoric relationship between death and sleep and Baudelaire’s own passing.

Another discerning characteristic of statements is its dynamic relationship to a subject. Our usual instincts might conflate the subject of the statement with the first-person grammatical elements expressed within the sentence of a statement. Moreover, we might expect this first-person subject to be the very author behind the formulation of the sentence. However, in reality the subject of the statement is much more variable, and not always inseparably connected with the author of the formulation. This dissociation between the author of the formulation and the

¹⁹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (Oxon: Routledge, 2002), 91.

¹⁹² Foucault, 91.

¹⁹³ Foucault, 101.

¹⁹⁴ David A. Webb, *Foucault’s Archaeology: Science and Transformation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 97.

subject of the statement is very clearly discovered in literature where the author of the novel is not the subject of the statements made by the characters of the novel. The variable nature of the subject of a statement might even shift on a per statement basis. For example, in a preface to a mathematical treatise, the original author could explain his personal methodology and problems which he has been unable to resolve. Accordingly, as Foucault states, the enunciative subject can only be occupied by the author. However, in the same treatise one might discover the following proposition: 'Two quantities equal to a third quantity are equal to each other'. Inevitably, in this case the subject of this statement can be anyone who affirms such a proposition¹⁹⁵. Thus, as Foucault concludes:

"The subject of the statement is a particular function, but is not necessarily the same from one statement to another; in so far as it is an empty function, that can be filled by virtually any individual when he formulates the statement; and in so far as one and the same individual may occupy in turn, in the same series of statements, different positions, and assume the role of different subjects."¹⁹⁶

Such a degree of proposed discernment favoured by the theory of statements, might seem overdiligent and fastidious in a thesis on Qur'an hermeneutics. However, various discursive phenomena from both classical and contemporary discourse on Qur'an hermeneutics warrant and necessitate such a level of discernment.

For starters, in classical Islamic discourse we are met with these two discursive phenomena: repetition of sentences with proper attribution to the author responsible for the original formulation, and repetition of sentences without mentioning the author responsible for the original formulation. Thus, there are different discourses wherein one discovers the words of the Prophet being expressed verbatim. However, there is an inherent difference to whether these statements are repeated in Sufi literature or the biography of the Prophet. In both

¹⁹⁵ Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 106.

¹⁹⁶ Foucault, 105.

cases the sentences are identical while the statements differ. Even the subject of the statement, for that matter, can shift from the Prophet to the Sufi thinker, thereby becoming his words, representing his statement, rather than that of the Prophet. On the other hand, we can identify the presence of the same sentences over a variety of works without proper attribution to the author responsible for their original formulation. One could, barring any potential accusation of anachronism, argue that this is merely a prototypical form of plagiarism. However, it is also quite possible to surmise from this repetition of sentences a transformation whereby the dissociation from the original author elevates the former sentences to a level in which they state the position of a school or tradition of thought, rather than the particular views of the original author. Such a reading becomes all the more plausible when we discover an on-going repetition of these sentences without subsequent attribution within future works belonging to the earlier mentioned tradition or school.

The present, contemporary thinkers of this thesis are also no exception where the need for the earlier mentioned discernment is concerned. First and foremost, similar to the prior discussion on classical authors, contemporary authors also repeat sentences originally formulated by other thinkers. Likewise, the very act of embedding these sentences in their own discourses, inevitably alters the modality of the statement expressed by these sentences.

A peculiar example of such an alteration can be found in the works of Cündioğlu. In two different works, Cündioğlu relates the words of ‘Ubaydallah b. Ḥassan (d. 784): “Verily the Qur’an evidences disagreement. Thus, the claim of freewill is correct (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and has a textual basis (*aṣl*). Likewise, the claim of fatalism (*al-ijbār*) is also correct and has also a textual basis.”, as ‘Ubaydallah continues, “For, each verse is one, possibly signifying two different aspects, and potentially carrying two different

meanings”¹⁹⁷. Moreover, ‘Ubaydallah argues that whoever accords the witting adulterer the status of believer is correct, but the one who argues that such a person is a disbeliever by virtue of their sin is also correct. For, “The Qur’an signifies all these meanings”¹⁹⁸. Nevertheless, what is of note in respect to Cündioğlu’s work, is the fact that in the first work, Cündioğlu refers to ‘Ubaydallah’s words to make a statement on the unrestricted potential of the Qur’an to be equivocal in its meanings¹⁹⁹. At this junction, the statement’s frame of reference is very much theoretical, and ‘Ubaydallah’s assertion functions in a manner that is akin to borrowing laboratory data or field research wherewith Cündioğlu supports his own claims. For, ‘Ubaydallah has demonstrates in line with Cündioğlu’s beliefs how one can cultivate multiple, conflicting meanings from the Qur’an. However, in his second work, Cündioğlu makes the reference to ‘Ubaydallah’s words again but with a different purpose. This second time, Cündioğlu uses ‘Ubaydallah’s words in order to make a statement about how present-day Muslims are modern day incarnates of ‘Ubaydallah, as their interpretations (*yorumlar*) and approach (*yaklaşım biçim*) remind us (*hatırlatır*) of ‘Ubaydallah²⁰⁰. A new post-modern, perhaps cynical, undertone is thereby ascribed to ‘Ubaydallah, that becomes reverberated through ‘Ubaydallah’s recurrent claims of “they are also correct”, “they also have a textual basis”, and “all of these meanings can be found in the Qur’an”. An undertone that is reminiscent of some post-modern relativist attitudes towards texts. As such, in the works of Cündioğlu we are met with two identical citations that ultimately embody two different statements. As Foucault describes this phenomenon: “Not only can this identity of the statement not be situated once and for all in relation to that of the sentence, but it is itself relative and oscillates according to the use that is made of the statement and the way in which it is handled.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Abū Muḥammad Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta’wīl Mukhtaliḥ Al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Al-Maktabat al-Islāmī, 1999), 95.

¹⁹⁸ Qutaybah, 95–96.

¹⁹⁹ Cündioğlu, *Kur’an’ı Anlama’nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 57–58.

²⁰⁰ Dücane Cündioğlu, *Anlamin buharlaşması ve Kur’an : Hermeneutik bir deneyim II* (İstanbul: Kapi Yayinlari, 2013), 64–65.

²⁰¹ Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 117.

Another more modern practice warranting the earlier proposed discernment, is specifically found in the re-publication of existing essays in new works. For example, Cündioğlu originally presented his first work on Qur'an hermeneutics for an academic audience at a symposium. Initially this presentation became collected and made available with other proceedings. However, the same work, with the same exact sentences, was later published multiple times as a book with newly added prefaces. Inevitably, each new preface became a new relationship for the original statements wherewith their modality became potentially reconfigured. Likewise, Alpyağıl collected three of his earlier published essays and further supplanted them with three newly written essays into a new book on Qur'an hermeneutics. Accordingly, previously expressed sentences in earlier statements, evolved again in their modality in accordance with the fact that they are now collected with three additional essays written with their collection in mind. Alternately, if one were to give little weight to such material conditions, it would mean, for example, that there is no inherent difference whether one studies Cündioğlu's original article or the later reprint with the additional prefaces. However, it is easy to see how much of a disservice this would be to the thought of the author in question.

One might approach the hitherto build-up and promotion of the statement in the context of Qur'an hermeneutics with a degree of scepticism. For, as one could tauntingly ask: "How much Qur'an hermeneutics can there even be of note in a statement?" To properly reply to this question, I wish to answer with various samples from the great body of classical Islamic discourse wherein statements are found that despite their small stature, are both profound and monumental.

Let us begin the discussion with the seminal work of the classical scholar al-Zarkashī, who specifically intended to author a book "that would collect (*jāmi'*) everything men have spoken of in respect to its [i.e. the Qur'an's] sciences."²⁰² Among the statements that al-Zarkashī found noteworthy, was a statement by al-

²⁰² Badr al-Dīn Muhammad Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān Fī-'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006), 19.

Shāfi'ī (d. 820), the eponymous grand jurist of the Shāfi'ī school of law to which al-Zarkashī belonged. The statement in question is as follows: "All that the community speaks of, is an explanation of the Prophetic precedent (*al-sunna*). The entire Prophetic precedent is an explanation of the Qur'an. And the entire Qur'an is an explanation of the exquisite names of God."²⁰³ Al-Shāfi'ī, who was known for his eloquence, masterfully moves the statement by the grace of its order through a vertical relationship from the most profane (the community) to the most sacred (the names of God). Representing a coherent intertwining of praxis (e.g. the *sunnah*) and intertextuality (e.g. *fiqh*, ḥadīth, Qur'an)²⁰⁴. Each added layer of understanding coming to mediate another, finally ending up at the precipice of the end of human intelligibility, which are the names of God, and whose transgression inevitably ends with the ineffable²⁰⁵ and the inaccessible: God's essence. Despite being succinct, such a statement undoubtably demonstrates the intricate Qur'an hermeneutics that one can discover even in a single statement, especially when it is unpacked by being further linked – to the degree of having no end in sight - with related statements belonging to other discourses, such as the literature on *fiqh*, *tafsīr* and *tasawwuf*.

Another noteworthy example of a statement of Qur'an hermeneutics, can be found in the work of al-Wāḥidī (d. 1075). The work in question, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (Occasions for Revelation), is introduced by al-Wāḥidī with the complaint that contemporaries have not been earnest in their pursuit of the sciences of the Qur'an. Accordingly, to present a counternarrative, al-Wāḥidī wrote a book for beginners in the subject matter that would teach them the occasions in which the Qur'an was revealed. For, and this is the statement of note, "It [i.e. occasions for revelation] is the best [science] that one ought to know and the most appropriate thing to which one

²⁰³ Al-Zarkashī, 19.

²⁰⁴ Each layer is inevitably 'embodied' in text. The community, among others, in texts of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the Prophet in the recorded oral reports (ḥadīth), and God, of course, in the Qur'an.

²⁰⁵ Alluded to by the fact that al-Shāfi'ī does not speak of God's essence (dhāt) as the last element in the grand chain of understanding but of the names of God.

should direct one's attention, since it is not possible to know the interpretation of a given verse or the meaning it alludes to without knowing its story and the occasion of its revelation."²⁰⁶ Despite being an elementary statement, this theoretical presupposition became an important staple of Qur'an hermeneutics within Islamic discourse. Thus, we discover that nearly five centuries later al-Suyūṭī still underwrote the propaedeutic and fundamental importance of al-Wāḥidī's statement for the understanding of the Qur'an by repeating the statement verbatim²⁰⁷ and by structuring his work on the sciences of Qur'an to begin with the data on the occasions of the revelation of the Qur'an. Moreover, the statement finds itself even repeated up to our present in the work *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* ('Investigations into the Sciences of the Qur'an') written by Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān (d. 1999)²⁰⁸. Almost a thousand years has passed, and still the truth once stated by al-Wāḥidī concerning the most proper means to understanding had not weaned in the least, that is "And the knowledge of the occasion for revelation is the best manner (*khayr al-sabīl*) to understand (*fahm*) the meanings of the Qur'an."²⁰⁹

These examples demonstrate that the breadth and weight of a statement should not be underestimated. Not in Islamic discourse, but I would additionally argue, also not beyond. For example, the Jewish sage Hillel was asked by a gentile to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel replied with the following, "That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation. Go study."²¹⁰ Likewise, Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment in the law is, to which he responded as follows: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." Jesus explained that it is this commandment

²⁰⁶ Alī ibn Ahmad Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb Al-Nuzūl*, ed. Yousef Meri, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), x.

²⁰⁷ Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, vol. 4 (Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya wa-al-Da'wa wa-al-Irshād, n.d.), 82.

²⁰⁸ Mannā' Al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Muassah al-Risālah, 2000), 80.

²⁰⁹ Al-Qaṭṭān, 80.

²¹⁰ William Davidson, "The William Davidson Talmud: Shabbat 31a," n.d., <https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.31a.6?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>.

together with its similar 'Love your neighbour as yourself', that are ultimately the basis upon which "all the Law and the Prophets hang"²¹¹.

With all of this said, we can finally draw formal conclusions concerning the essence/materiality of Qur'an hermeneutics. As prior stated, hermeneutics in the absolute sense concerns itself reflectively with the conditions and operations involved in any kind of understanding (passive or active). In other words, it fundamentally inquiries into how and under which circumstances the meaning of something, whatever that thing is, becomes intelligible. Qur'an hermeneutics, on the other hand, denotes only the particularity and exactitude where this general hermeneutical task of reflecting on how the meaning of things become intelligible is further constricted and derivatively developed in reference to whatever is signified specifically by 'the Qur'an'. Qur'an hermeneutics is specifically involved in theorising on the conditions and operations as to how the particular meanings of the Qur'an become intelligible. Moreover, Qur'an hermeneutics, or hermeneutics for that matter, are at their lowest level expressed by statements relating to the aforementioned theoretical concerns. Qur'an hermeneutics, is therefore not, as often thought, materially bound to exclusive concepts or movements such as *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, *ta'wīl*, nor is it particularly related to various literary genres (e.g. *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *'ulūm al-qur'ān*, or *uṣūl al-tafsīr*). Rather the discourse belonging to such concepts, movements, and literary genres, are some of the fields in which we can discover statements of Qur'an hermeneutics.

²¹¹ NIV Matt. 22:36-40

A Case Against Subjectivity and Relativism: The Hermeneutics of Dücan Cündioğlu

Introduction

Born in 1962 in Istanbul in the district of Üsküdar, Cündioğlu started his career in the early eighties by writing for various magazines and newspapers. He has since grown into a prolific author who has written different articles, columns, books, and novels on a variety of philosophical and theological topics. To the general public he is perhaps best known for his columns in the conservative Turkish newspaper *Yeni Şafak* and his occasional appearance on Turkish television.

Unlike the other authors of this thesis, Cündioğlu is the only author without formal academic training or teaching position. Nevertheless, despite not being an academic professor, Cündioğlu is known to give the occasional lecture, teaching various subjects such as philosophy and *tafsīr* at various institutions and research foundations. According to Silverstein, Cündioğlu's absence in the formal academic circuit, seems to be more of a technical nature, rather than related to the quality of his work. "The reasons for his institutional marginality would seem to be mainly technical and/or legal ones, for the quality and quantity of his publications is, it must be said, far superior to those of many on the country's university faculties."²¹² This fact becomes further evident when we discover the many references other academics make to Cündioğlu's work in their papers and books.

Despite Cündioğlu's marginal presence in the formal academic circuit, or perhaps because of it²¹³, Cündioğlu has developed a veritable following throughout the years. This is particularly evidenced by his social media following. His Twitter

²¹² Silverstein, *Islamist critique*, p. 150

²¹³ Certain conservative Turkish readers distrust Turkish academia due to its members espousing anti-conservative ideas.

account alone is followed by three hundred sixty thousand members²¹⁴. One will be hard pressed to find similar numbers among Cündioğlu's academic peers.

Moreover, since the end of March 2020, Cündioğlu also has built a respectable presence on YouTube by uploading videos on a weekly basis that he films with a simple webcam from the comfort of his own home. Some of these videos have reached almost a hundred thousand views. In these videos Cündioğlu addresses a range of philosophical and religious topics, such as what freedom and justice are, and what the significance of fasting is.

Besides a few sporadic references, relatively little research has been done on the works of Cündioğlu outside the Turkish context. The most substantial Western study to date, has been Silverstein's article *Islamist Critique in Modern Turkey: Hermeneutics, Tradition, Genealogy*. While this study does not specifically explain the fundamental principles of Cündioğlu's hermeneutical outlook, it does provide a noteworthy description of the specific context and features of Cündioğlu's thought. From Silverstein's essay, we discover that Cündioğlu belongs to a larger movement of Islamist thinkers that are characterized by a twofold ambition. First, they aim to develop a critical genealogy of present social forms and practices. Second, they seek to reflect on the nature of sources and interpretation²¹⁵.

What the latter meant in the case of Cündioğlu, is further delineated in one of Cündioğlu's interviews. In this interview, Cündioğlu describes the advent of his thinking on the sources of Islam. To recall Cündioğlu's words:

"I was solemnly preoccupied with the Qur'an. During those times²¹⁶ this was the dominant tendency (*eğilim*). I was also following that tendency²¹⁷. After this tendency, the *mealcilik* (exclusive reliance on the translation of the Qur'an)

²¹⁴ As of October 2020.

²¹⁵ Silverstein, *Islamist critique*, p. 134-135

²¹⁶ The timeline to which Cündioğlu is referring is not entirely clear. However, given the mention of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk translation of the Qur'an, and the time that Cündioğlu himself started publishing on the Qur'an, it seems Cündioğlu is referring to the 90s.

²¹⁷ This tendency, namely the return to the Qur'an, was discussed in more details in the first chapter in reference to Özsoy's genealogy of Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey.

movement came to be. For example, names such as Edip Yüksel and Yaşar Nuri Öztürk were influenced by this tendency. Everyone that had an issue with tradition and lived Islam, were looking for an unblemished foundation and source. What could this be but the Qur'an? It could have also been the practices (*uygulamalar*) of our Prophet. [However] the practices [of the Prophet] had issues and did not carry certainty (*kesinlik taşıyor*). Accordingly (*o halde*), there was only one foundation (*dayanak*) that we could blindly apply our lives to. I on the other hand, opened my eyes²¹⁸ and preferred to only rely on the Qur'an."²¹⁹

These last sentences are also very revealing in regard to the marginal role of the *sunna* of the Prophet in the hermeneutical theories of certain Turkish thinkers. In other words, it gives one possible answer as to why the explicit significance of the *sunna* in interpreting the Qur'an is often omitted from the discussions on Qur'an hermeneutics – despite authors, more so when they are conservative, being aware of its existence. Cündioğlu explains this attitude towards the *sunna* by stating that the *sunna* did not carry the same epistemic force, namely 'certainty' (*kesinlik*) as the Qur'an did. While Cündioğlu does not further divulge into the details of this problem, it is possible to intuit from references to 'unproblematic foundations' and 'certainty', that Cündioğlu is alluding to the loss of the self-evident primacy of the *sunna* in modernity as a foundational source of Islamic thought²²⁰.

Cündioğlu's words demonstrate that the stage for the discussions on the interpretation of the Qur'an was set by known skeptics of the classical *ḥadīth* tradition, such as Edip Yüksel and Yaşar Nuri Öztürk. While the Qur'an was universally accepted, the tradition of *ḥadīth* – the source that embodied the *sunna* – was not. Thinkers such as Yüksel would contend that the *ḥadīth* tradition was full of fabrication and lies attributed to the Prophet. Any desire for a broad appeal and

²¹⁸ Cündioğlu is alluding to the reflective nature of his work. In other words, he did not blindly rely on the Qur'an but with open eyes, i.e. consciously and with intellectual deliberation.

²¹⁹ Özgül Apaçe, "Sıradışı Bir Entelektüel: Dücane Cündioğlu," *Yeni Aktüel*, 2011.

²²⁰ "Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, some Muslim scholars began challenging core components of the pre-modern Islamic tradition. Some concluded that the hadith tradition was not at all a reliable representation of Muhammad's message. A few of these thinkers went so far as to reject altogether the authoritativeness of the Prophet's precedent. We can label this overall trend as Islamic Modernism, which is characterized by a radical reconsideration of classical Islamic beliefs." Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 243–44.

alignment with ongoing discussions, would require that the first principles of any new outlook on Islam, even those proposed by conservatives as Cündioğlu, had to be formulated in relation to a universally accepted source, namely the Qur'an.

Another characteristic of Cündioğlu's works, comes from the fact that Cündioğlu primarily writes from a self-designated philosophical perspective; hence, his works should not be understood in the frame of classical Islamic works or the modern ideas of Turkish academic theologians (*ilâhiyatçı*). For example, the first section of his second book in hermeneutics is titled: *A Philosophical Analysis of the Essence of Understanding the Qur'an* (Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Mahiyeti Üzerine Felsefi Bir Çözümleme). Thus, Cündioğlu should be identified as a contemporary Muslim philosopher, rather than a conventional madrasa educated scholar or academically trained theologian. Nevertheless, despite not writing according to the standards of classical Islamic scholarship, Cündioğlu's oeuvre is still laden with Ottoman-Turkish terminology and expressions that might feel very arcane by colloquial standards but demonstrate his strong literacy in classical Islamic sources.

While Cündioğlu has written a variety of interesting works, the focus of this thesis will be primarily limited to two works that are dedicated to the topic of Qur'an hermeneutics: *The Meaning of Understanding the Qur'an: An Experiment in Hermeneutics I* (Kuran'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I) and *The Evaporation of Meaning and the Qur'an: An Experiment in Hermeneutics II* (Anlamın Buharlaşması ve Kur'an: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim II). The fact that these works are hermeneutical in nature, is clearly evidenced by their respective subtitles. Moreover, the enumeration present in both subtitles, suggests a relationship of continuity between both projects on which I shall return shortly. However, both works are ultimately part of a larger series called Critical Qur'an Studies (Kur'an Tedkikleri), which also includes other works by Cündioğlu on different Qur'an related topics, such as the integrity of Turkish Qur'an translations.

Cündioğlu deems his second publication to be a continuation (*devamı*) of his prior work²²¹. In like manner to his first work, Cündioğlu argues to once more (*yine*) centre his inquiry around “the problem of understanding of the Qur’an” (*Kur’an’ı anlama sorununu*), namely, how to establish the conditions of understanding a text from the structure of the text itself (*metnin yapısından*)²²². Accordingly, given the repetitious nature of Cündioğlu’s goals, it should come as no surprise that his second work is only complimentary to his first work. While both works exhibit a shared goal, the manner and concepts wherewith this goal is realized, are – as we shall soon discover - different.

Besides their repetitious nature, both of Cündioğlu’s works exhibit a strong critical character. To recall, in the introduction chapter of this thesis, it was argued that a recurrent characteristic found in Turkish Qur’an hermeneutics is the desire by theoreticians to respond to a perceived excess in the way that the Qur’an was interpreted by different parties in contemporary Turkey. The theories of the three authors that are the topic of this thesis are no exception. Nonetheless, while each theory shares a reactive and pedagogical trait, there is still a difference in how each author envisions what the fundamental problems of circulating Qur’an interpretations are. In the case of Cündioğlu, as a further analysis of the context of his works will evidence, his hermeneutics is devised to act as a counteragent to the subjectivist and relativistic readings of the Qur’an that Cündioğlu finds both theoretically defunct and unconstructive.

In the following sections I will analyse these two works of Cündioğlu in order to show that the essence of Cündioğlu’s hermeneutics revolves around the reconstruction of the objective authorial intent. In Cündioğlu’s framework the ultimate reference of meaning is not the subject’s private and contingent understanding but the transcendent, objective intention of the original author. The

²²¹ Cündioğlu, *Anlamin buharlaşması ve Kur’an : Hermeneutik bir deneyim II*, ix.

²²² Cündioğlu, ix.

transcendent, objective intention of the original author, however, can only be retrieved by examining the historical and linguistic material aspects of expressions. However, since the Qur'an's meaning is also intrinsically historical, it means that a present-day subject is given no license to apply himself to creative readings of the Qur'an that were historically foreign or implausible. Otherwise, as Cündioğlu retorts, if the Qur'an could only be understood by a future audience, it would conflict with the Qur'an's imperative to be reflected upon by those present during the 22-year period of revelation. Hence, the subject's role must ultimately not be defined in terms of an inventor of new meanings but as an archaeologist of objective meanings anchored in the past.

The Meaning of Understanding the Qur'an

The Meaning of Understanding the Qur'an was initially written and published as an article for the first ever annual Week of the Qur'an, Qur'an Symposium (Kur'an Haftası Kur'an Sempozyumu) held during the month of Ramadan in 1995. The very same period that Özsoy had characterised as the decade in which heightened discussions were held in Turkey concerning how the Qur'an should be studied and understood. While this article was originally conceived as an academic work, Cündioğlu would soon present his work to the general populace by having it republished in book format with additional prefaces. It is in these prefaces, that Cündioğlu sheds further light on his original motives and the reception history of his work in Turkey. Accordingly, in the following segment I will first examine some of the relevant contextual aspects of Cündioğlu's thinking before I advance into the fundamental assumptions of his hermeneutical theory.

Cündioğlu argues that the goal of his first work was to develop a set of fundamental principles of Qur'anic interpretation and demonstrate how these principles would affect the understanding of the Qur'an²²³. The principles that he enumerates are

²²³Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 9.

based on a hermeneutical inquiry into what the exact relationship between reader and text is, or how the circumstances and conditions surrounding text and reader influence the process of understanding the Qur'an²²⁴. Cündioğlu is inevitably aware that such questions were already addressed in the tradition of *tafsîr*. However, without divulging into any details as to why this is the case, Cündioğlu concludes that the classical tradition has answered these questions insufficiently (*yeterli değil*). Moreover, the *tafsîr* tradition is seen by Cündioğlu as being hardly accessible to the modern reader, since it demands arduous and long research in order to properly function as a hermeneutical frame of reference²²⁵. According to Cündioğlu, rather than helping to bridge the fundamental rift between modern humans and the Qur'an, the *tafsîr* tradition, by virtue of its difficult and inaccessible nature, only further exacerbates this rift.

In his second preface, however, Cündioğlu confesses a different motive behind his work. Accordingly, Cündioğlu writes that he wanted to write a work that would establish the fundamental conditions for understanding the Qur'an that would defend 'the children of this nation' (*bu toprakların çocukları*) from those who try to beguile (*aldatanlar*) them in the name of the Qur'an²²⁶. Moreover, he wanted to come to terms with developments in 20th century Western hermeneutics, and to demonstrate that postmodernism²²⁷ could not provide any constructive contribution to the problem of understanding and interpreting the Qur'an²²⁸.

Despite his best intentions, Cündioğlu laments that his work was not as well received as he had hoped for. As Cündioğlu recalls, he was ahead of his time, since

²²⁴ Cündioğlu, 9.

²²⁵ Cündioğlu, 9–10.

²²⁶ While Cündioğlu does not go into further details, it can be surmised from his overall text that Cündioğlu is referring to interpretations that serve to further an ideological agenda, rather than what the Qur'an is believed to be saying by Cündioğlu. Cündioğlu, 7.

²²⁷ Cündioğlu refrains from what he understands as postmodernism. However, going by his overall text, as we shall discover in the proceeding sections, it seems that Cündioğlu is referring to a broad cultural movement that has renounced the belief in objective meaning, and as such, deems every interpretation of texts to be relative.

²²⁸ Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 7–8.

he had presented an answer to an audience that had not yet come to ask the questions he had answered²²⁹. Instead, the Turkish theological community met his work with sneer and criticism, sometimes going as far as claiming a relation (*alâkalı*) to New Testament exegesis (*İncil yorumlarıyla*)²³⁰. Nonetheless, Cündioğlu argues, while it might not have been explicitly attributed to his own efforts, the terminology and views he had expressed had become gradually more and more accepted and helped define the topics of subsequent graduate and postgraduate theses. Rather than feeling happiness from this turn of events, Cündioğlu was only left embittered, claiming that the pursuit of knowledge was not without its price²³¹. For, as we can surmise, the price of being a pioneer is to be chastised for novel ideas that are at first instance assaulted, only for these ideas to subsequently become mainstays with increased understanding and exposure.

Hermeneutical beginnings

The first premise of Cündioğlu's hermeneutics, is the conviction that the Qur'an is a linguistic event (*dilsel bir olgu*)²³². Cündioğlu defines this assumption as follows: "Since the Qur'an is God's discourse (*kelâm*), His speaking (*konusması*), it is pre-eminently related to language (*dil*), [and is therefore] a linguistic event (*dilsel bir olgu*)."²³³ Hence, to understand the Qur'an, is "to understand and interpret a speech, a word (*söz*), [or] an expression (linguistic text) in language."²³⁴ However, since the Qur'an is realized in language, our understanding of language will reciprocally define our understanding of the Qur'an.

²²⁹ Cündioğlu, 8.

²³⁰ Unfortunately Cündioğlu does not name or elaborate on the arguments made by his detractors. Cündioğlu, 8.

²³¹ Cündioğlu, 8.

²³² Another synonym that Cündioğlu uses is *nass-ı lugavî* (linguistic text). Cündioğlu, 15.

²³³ Cündioğlu, 18.

²³⁴ Cündioğlu, 19.

Up to this point nothing has been said by Cüendioğlu, that the classical authorities on Qur'an hermeneutics had also not argued before. Cüendioğlu acknowledges this and reminds us how language has always taken centre stage in the traditions of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *tafsīr*. The latter can inevitably be witnessed, argues Cüendioğlu, in the classical enumeration of sciences that a scholar ought to master before he or she can start to interpret the Qur'an. In *al-Taysir fī Qawā'id 'Ilm al-Tafsīr* (An Easy Introduction into the Rules of the Science of Exegesis), the Ottoman scholar Kafiyeçi (d. 1474) had listed fifteen prerequisite sciences needed by the exegete. Out of these fifteen, notes Cüendioğlu, seven pertain to language. Including such sciences as rhetoric, morphology, and grammar. In other words, more than two thirds of a *tafsīr* scholar's qualifications revolve around the expertise of language²³⁵.

The significance of language for the understanding of the Qur'an is undeniable, and Cüendioğlu's own hermeneutics incepts from a fundamental phenomenological understanding of communication within language. At the base of this phenomenological understanding resides the dialectical distinction between meaning-conveyance and meaning-understanding. In other words, his hermeneutics pivots on the elementary assumption that when something meaningful is expressed, there will always be someone on the one end that conveys a message with meaning, and someone on the other hand that receives and interprets this meaning.

For Cüendioğlu, meaning-conveyance involves a conveyor (*anlatan*), the act of conveying (*anlatım*) and an object being conveyed (*anlatılan*)²³⁶. As Cüendioğlu explains, to convey meaning is to realize a communicative event with three fundamental elements: a person that addresses (*muhatıb*) someone, a person that is being addressed (*muhatap*), and the address (*hitab*) itself²³⁷. For example, if I

²³⁵ Cüendioğlu, 18.

²³⁶ An alternate translation of "anlatan-anlatım-anlatılan" would be "enunciator-enunciation-narrative".

²³⁷ Cüendioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 20.

were to ask my daughter to drink her milk, the conveyor or addressing subject would be me, while my daughter would be the addressee, and the imperative to drink milk would be the object, or more specifically, the address conveyed. Meaning, as Cündioğlu contends, is nothing other than the object (*şey*) which the conveyor wishes to convey (*iletmek*).

On the other end, where the reception and understanding of meaning is concerned, Cündioğlu presents a corresponding tri-partite division structured around the understanding subject, the act of understanding, and what is understood. As Cündioğlu argues, when a linguistic message is conveyed, one customarily also witnesses the presence of a subject who receives the message (*anlayan*). After receiving the message, the recipient subsequently engages in the act of understanding (*anlama*). The latter act effects consequently a “what-is-understood” (*anslaşılın*)²³⁸. The following example could shed some further light on this understanding of meaning recipience. Accordingly, let us imagine that there is a person A and a person B. Person A exclaims “help!” to person B, thereby resulting in person B to become the understanding subject (*anlayan*). Person B receives this message and proceeds in an act of understanding (*anlama*). By engaging in the act of understanding, he or she comes to the realization that person A is requesting urgent assistance (*anslaşılın/what-is-understood*).

With this model of communication in place, Cündioğlu is able to outline a concrete criterium where correct understanding (*doğru anlam*) can be differentiated from misunderstanding (*yanlış anlam*). Accordingly, Cündioğlu argues that when the what-is-understood does not correspond with the object intended by the original interlocutor, then the original intention has undeniably been misunderstood²³⁹. However, the opposite also holds true: if one is able to reconstruct the intended

²³⁸ Cündioğlu, 20–21.

²³⁹ Cündioğlu, 21.

meaning and correspond his or her own understanding in accordance with the intention, then correct understanding has been realized.

If understanding is achieved through correspondence between what is originally intended and what has been understood, then the main question becomes how one can reconstruct the original intention? In a conventional dialogical situation, one can simply ask the interlocutor to explain his intent. However, according to Cündioğlu, in instances where this is not possible, such as when the interlocutor is no longer present, the main question within a process of interpretation has to shift away from “What do *you* mean with this expression?” to “What does *this expression signify?*”²⁴⁰ In other words, whatever the answer is to what an expression means must be constructed from the strict material confines of the expression itself, and not through a questioning of the original author.

The material confines of an expression are defined by what Cündioğlu calls “the natural connections of an expression” (*söz’ün tabii bağlamı*). To further clarify, the natural connections are the characteristic, material relationships that any meaningful linguistic expression has. They are the necessary components that are constitutive of any meaningful expression. As Cündioğlu explains, “The natural connections (*tabii bağlam*), however, are made up of elements such as the content (*söylenen*), the addressee (*kendisine söylenen*), the reason for something being uttered (*niçin söylenen*), the time and place that belongs to the utterance (*ne zaman ve nerede söylendiği*)”²⁴¹ A description, which he in a subsequent section further extends by arguing that the manner in which the author expresses something (*nasıl söylüyor*), e.g. by way of metaphor or narratives, also belongs to the natural connections an expression has²⁴². Accordingly, by reconstructing an expression in reference to these characteristics, as a later section will further

²⁴⁰ Cündioğlu, 23.

²⁴¹ Cündioğlu, 22.

²⁴² Cündioğlu, 101–2.

illustrate, an interpreter is assured the retrieval of the objective meaning of an expression.

There is no doubt that this material approach to interpretation addresses the typical hermeneutical problem of historical distance. By suggesting a reconstructive method, Cündioğlu attempts to present a remedy to the problem of how new recipients can understand a historical message that was originally conveyed during certain circumstance in which they were absent, and whose original author they can no longer reach for further clarification. As such, Cündioğlu presents a very critical answer to age-old problem within Qur'an hermeneutics: how is one to shed light on God's word and decipher it after the departure of the Prophet of God, humanity's most direct communication channel to understanding the revelation of God?

The problems of a Qur'an hermeneutics grounded in subjectivity

Before Cündioğlu fully answers this question with his proposed epistemology of interpretation, Cündioğlu further edifies his objectivist theory by counterpoising it with its intellectual counterpart, subjectivism. For Cündioğlu the starting point of subjectivism begins with the dissolution of the earlier mentioned dialectics between meaning-conveyance and meaning-understanding. In other words, as Cündioğlu claims, when interpretations no longer relate their understanding to the interlocutor's intention behind a statement (*anlatılan*) but to what an interpreter regardless of this intention personally understands (*anlaşılan*). In such an instance, the subject becomes the sole authority of meaning. However, when the authority of meaning is no longer located exterior to the subject, then the subject, according to Cündioğlu, receives a carte blanche to interpret the Qur'an in whatever way that suits his or her interests. As a result, Cündioğlu concludes that the Qur'an runs the risk of being "made to speak" (*konuşturmak*)²⁴³ according to the terms laid out by the subject's vested interests, rather than what the Qur'an wishes to objectively

²⁴³ Cündioğlu, 28.

convey. In more technical terms, the Qur'an becomes explained (*müfesser*), rather than what it really is according to Cündioğlu: self-explaining (*bi zatihi müfessir*)²⁴⁴.

Cündioğlu who is deeply conversant with recent Turkish studies and translations of the Qur'an, presents three examples that he believes demonstrate how the Qur'an's understanding might be impeded by subjective interests. These examples involve the explanation of verses that relate to the following controversial topics: the covering of women's bodies, the disciplining of women by their husbands, and the corporal punishment of thieves. Cündioğlu suspects that the modern explanations of these verses, all of whom undermine their classical understanding, were all born out of the inability to harmonize modern sensibilities with the message of the Qur'an, rather than what the text really has to say²⁴⁵. However, rather than allowing for the dissonance to persist between what the text *prima facie* signifies and the values and norms set by the modern world, interpreters are accused of revising their understanding (*yeni bir forma sokmak*)²⁴⁶ into something which they deem more acceptable.

The first example presented by Cündioğlu is his most terse, and hence, most ambiguous example²⁴⁷. This example pertains to the covering of women and begins with the premise that the Qur'an is univocal about the fact that women have to be covered. Whether this means head or face is not clarified by Cündioğlu. However, that the Qur'an only seems to suggest that women ought to cover only their breasts, as Cündioğlu's anonymous opponent translates verse 24:31, is vehemently opposed by Cündioğlu. Without going into detail, Cündioğlu argues that such a reading is not something derived from philological evidence (*filolojik deliller*) but

²⁴⁴ Cündioğlu, 33–34.

²⁴⁵ Cündioğlu, 29.

²⁴⁶ Cündioğlu, 29.

²⁴⁷ We have to remember that Cündioğlu was talking to an academic public when he initially presented this work. Accordingly, I suspect that the omission of details in Cündioğlu's examples is due to the fact that simple allusions would have sufficed in those times to remind his audience of the "exegetical deception" (Cündioğlu's ultimate point) that is currently in effect amongst circulating politically correct, anachronistic interpretations of the Qur'an.

from screened causes (*arkada kalan sebepler*)²⁴⁸. What these screened causes are is not entirely clear, but Cündioğlu believes that the previously mentioned revisionist reading of the verse stems from the interpreter's belief that the covering of the head is no longer defensible (*savunulabilir*)²⁴⁹. This could mean a variety of things, none of which are explicitly presented by Cündioğlu, as Cündioğlu cuts off his argument. However, given the history of westernization in Islamicate countries, it seems to hint towards the fact that modern interpreters can no longer advocate the head scarf as it conflicts with the dress code of women defined by contemporary western standards. that had already been appropriated by a large population of Turkish society. Accordingly, Cündioğlu suggests that these interpreters revise their understanding into something more practical, such as the covering of the breasts, which is inevitably already an acceptable custom within the majority of the western world.

On the other hand, Cündioğlu's second example is more straightforward and explicit. There is no doubt that all of Cündioğlu's examples pertain to very controversial topics in Qur'an studies. His discussion of 4:34 is no exception, since it deals with the issue of whether men are allowed to swat their wives or not. Cündioğlu claims that the Qur'an allows according to a conventional reading for men to swat their wives under exceptional circumstances. However, argues Cündioğlu, in light of our modern understanding of women rights and male-female relationships, this conventional reading becomes indefensible. As Pink clarifies the Turkish context from which Cündioğlu speaks:

"Regardless of what construct of marriage and gender hierarchy one holds to be preferable or even God-given, it is hard to see the act of beating his wife as a man's natural right today in the same unconcerned way that an exegete in the nineteenth or early-twentieth century might have done. For exactly that reason, the debate to which the above-mentioned thread starter refers has emerged: a debate on whether the Arabic word for 'beating', 'striking' or 'hitting', *daraba*, might have an entirely different meaning here. That opinion has increasingly been promoted since

²⁴⁸ Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 30.

²⁴⁹ Cündioğlu, 30.

the 1990s in the context of a debate on marital violence in particular and gender equality in general.”²⁵⁰

Accordingly, argues Cündioğlu, interpreters who were conflicted with traditional readings, enumerated other potential meanings (*anlam dökümü*) from which they subsequently selected a more suitable interpretation to *daraba*²⁵¹. As a result, what was previously understood as ‘hitting’ (*daraba*), was now – on account of the word’s rich polysemy – reinterpreted as ‘expelling’²⁵².

In contrast to the two previous gender related examples, Cündioğlu’s final example pertains to the issue of capital punishment in the Qur’an. The verse in question within this example is 5:38. Accordingly, to illustrate Cündioğlu’s point about how this verse is conventionally read, we can refer to Yusuf Ali’s translation: “As to the thief, Male or female, cut off his or her hands: a punishment by way of example”. As one can imagine, some interpreters that might feel such verses to be too brutal, will inevitably opt for an alternate interpretation of this verse. Hence, argues Cündioğlu, it is no surprise that some interpreters have revised the conventional translation of ‘cutting’ for ‘scathing’ (*çizmek*)²⁵³. Nonetheless, as with the previous examples: what is guiding in interpretation is not so much a philological honesty, since the Arabic imperative *iqṭaʿ* mentioned in the verse means customarily cutting, but what is palatable by the interpreting subject.

When the de facto reference of meaning is the interpretation of the subject, then it is most likely that subjects who face interpretative dilemma’s, will resolve these dilemma’s by involving their own private or cultural inclinations about certain issues. Hence, as the previous examples argued, if an interpreter is faced with a less acceptable reading of the Qur’an, they could potentially resort to the rich polysemy present in the Qur’an. Such interpreters, as one of the examples demonstrated,

²⁵⁰ Pink, *Muslim Qur’ānic Interpretation Today*, 285.

²⁵¹ Cündioğlu, *Kur’an’ı Anlama’nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 30.

²⁵² Cündioğlu, 31.

²⁵³ Cündioğlu, 32.

could argue that the customary understanding of *ḍaraba*, which is ‘hitting’, is in reality not the one intended by the Qur’an. Rather, the Qur’an intends to mean ‘expelling’, thus giving spouses the right to correct (*te’dib*) their wives under exceptional circumstances by expelling themselves from their homes, rather than allowing men to hit their wives. In lieu of these examples, it is no surprise that Cündioğlu directs his next hermeneutical question to the status of polysemy in the Qur’an.

Polysemy, subjectivity, and the Qur’an

The status of polysemy is not only relevant in cases when there are interpretative dilemma’s but also in regard to the problem of what I would like to call ‘meaning concurrency’. In other words, in regard to the question as to whether the Qur’an can intentionally and simultaneously mean multiple different things? In the likely event that the Qur’an does simultaneously intend multiple different meanings, then inevitably different subjectivities can claim to understand the Qur’an in variant ways. However, on the other hand, if the Qur’an does not intentionally embody multiple meanings, then the door to relativism in interpretation closes, and the appeal to objectivism becomes both critical and revitalized by a new argument.

By analysing the problem of meaning concurrency and the classical views on language, Cündioğlu comes to the conclusion that the presence of polysemy in the Qur’an cannot be leveraged to legitimize any subjective pluralism in understanding the Qur’an. To make his case, Cündioğlu relies on both arguments from reason as well as tradition. In respect to the prior, Cündioğlu points out that a belief in concurrent meanings is an untenable idea that undermines the very possibility of meaningful communication. Whereas in respect to the latter, Cündioğlu demonstrates that the presence of polysemy in the Arabic language has never been acknowledged by a variety of classical experts to indicate the possibility of meaning concurrency.

For Cündioğlu divergent understandings are not so much purported by expressions but are rather side-effects occasioned by the audience's subjective diversity²⁵⁴. In other words, the surplus of meaning is not so much in "what is conveyed" (*anlatılan*) but "what is understood" (*anlaşılan*)²⁵⁵. Meaning, as a previously demonstrated, is effected by an objective intention. This intention has to function in a solitary way. Otherwise, if one were to intend everything simultaneously, one would in the end intend nothing at all²⁵⁶. As Cündioğlu cites Aristotle:

"If on the other hand it be said that "man" has an infinite number of meanings, obviously there can be no discourse; for not to have one meaning is to have no meaning, and if words have no meaning there is an end of discourse with others, and even, strictly speaking, with oneself; because it is impossible to think of anything if we do not think of one thing"²⁵⁷.

Cündioğlu goes on to argue that by intending different, contradicting things simultaneously (*farklı anlamlar*), one undoubtably generates meanings that cancel each other out²⁵⁸. One simply cannot intend multiple contradicting things simultaneously: "it is impossible that 'being man' should have the same meaning as 'not being man'"²⁵⁹.

As the previous section on the revisionist readings of the Qur'an demonstrated, a notable size of Cündioğlu's hermeneutical views can be retraced to problems in the relatively new Turkish culture of Qur'an translations (*meal*). Cündioğlu's advocacy of objectivism and antipathy of meaning concurrency, can similarly be retraced to a very concrete Qur'an translation that is exemplary of this problem in interpretation. The translation in question, cited by Cündioğlu without source, translates verse 96:2

²⁵⁴ Cündioğlu, 34.

²⁵⁵ Cündioğlu, 36.

²⁵⁶ Cündioğlu, 34.

²⁵⁷ Aristotle, *The Metaphysics: Books I-IX*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1923), 137; Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 34–35.

²⁵⁸ Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 34.

²⁵⁹ Aristotle, *The Metaphysics: Books I-IX*, 167.

as follows: “He created the human from an embryo/from sticky water/love and care.”²⁶⁰ As the translation evidences, the author presents three different translations of the Arabic *‘alaq*, all of which are separated by a slash. According to Cündioğlu, the word *‘alaq* cannot concurrently signify all these three different entities on account of irreconcilable differences between these entities²⁶¹. For example, given the question as to what the human is created from, Cündioğlu argues that the answer cannot be love (immaterial) and embryo (material) at the same time, since two contradictions cannot exist together in the same place²⁶². In other words, if one were to ask whether the human was created from a material or immaterial substance, the answer cannot be both, because a substance is either material or immaterial.

Nonetheless, disagreements as occasioned by multivalent expression in the Qur’an cannot be denied among the schools of legal thought in Islam, and Cündioğlu is acutely aware of this. One concrete example presented by Cündioğlu, concerns the meaning of *lamastum* in verse 5:6. In this verse, believers are commanded to purify themselves after having performed the act of *lamasa* on women. *Lamasa*, on account of its multiple meanings, can either signify general physical contact or more specifically coitus. While the prior has been a reading advocated by the jurist al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 820), the latter reading was opined by Abu Ḥanīfa (d. 767)²⁶³. Nevertheless, while Cündioğlu acknowledges that one can read the verse in different possible ways, as different legal schools have done, this does not mean “that the interlocutor (*kelam sahibi*) intended two different meanings concurrently in the same verse.”²⁶⁴

Cündioğlu has certainly not been the first to argue that polysemic expressions are not evidence of concurrently different intentions in the Qur’an. The problem of

²⁶⁰ Cündioğlu, *Kur’an’ı Anlama’nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 36–37.

²⁶¹ Cündioğlu, 37.

²⁶² Cündioğlu, 37.

²⁶³ Cündioğlu, 37.

²⁶⁴ Cündioğlu, 37.

polysemy, or its classical Ottoman equivalent *lafz-i müşterek*, has already been the topic of many *uṣūl al-fiqh* works. The majority of classical Ḥanafī scholars have according to Cündioğlu all expressed the fact that polysemic expressions do not function by way of concurrency (*ṣumul*)²⁶⁵ but by way of substitution (*bedel*). In other words, a word with a multitude of meanings will always function in a given sentence with one of its meanings to the exclusion of all its other potential meanings.

While numerous *uṣūl al-fiqh* scholars, especially among the Ḥanafīs and Mu'tazilīs, have argued against meaning concurrency, there have been noteworthy authorities such as al-Shāfi' that have argued in favour of the possibility of meaning concurrency²⁶⁶. Proponents of this view derive support from such verses as 22:18 wherein the verb *yasjudu* ('bowing', 'prostrating') is being used in reference to animals, trees, stars, and humans. To reiterate the verse in question: "Seest thou not that to Allah bow down [*yasjudu*] in worship all things that are in the heavens and on earth,- the sun, the moon, the stars; the hills, the trees, the animals; and a great number among humankind?" Those who accept meaning concurrency²⁶⁷ argue that this verb cannot relate with the same meaning to categorically different entities such as trees, stars, and humans. Trees obviously cannot perform the act of prostration in which they render their faces unto the ground. However, trees can figuratively 'bow down' by obeying God's will. Thus, while prostration should be understood literally in reference to humans, it should be understood figuratively in reference to trees or stars.

Classical authors who deny the presence of meaning concurrency in the Qur'an²⁶⁸, have presented an alternate reading of 22:18. According to these authors, it is

²⁶⁵ This word literally means 'comprehensive', and in reference to the topic at hand, would refer to the fact that one single expression cannot denote in a comprehensive manner all its potential meanings concurrently. Cündioğlu, 52.

²⁶⁶ Cündioğlu, 51.

²⁶⁷ Cündioğlu provides no exact identities to who these classical authorities are.

²⁶⁸ Cündioğlu presents yet again only the view and not any references to those who have held such a view.

possible to apply the figurative meaning of *yasjudu* to all the different categories mentioned in the verse without having to compromise the idea of a single meaning. In other words, if the starting point of our understanding is that *yasjudu* means submission (*inkiyad*), then the verb can apply without any alteration to both humans, stars, and trees²⁶⁹. As such, by not taking the literal meaning as the fundamental starting point of our understanding of *yasjudu* but the figurative meaning, no interpretative quandary remains that would have otherwise forced a resolution by admission of meaning concurrency.

Some classical linguists have also argued against the presence of meaning concurrency. One of the authorities referenced by Cündioğlu in this regard is Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 940). According to Ibn al-Anbārī, the words of the Arabs are in a structural relationship with each other: certain words realize meaning by aiding and complimenting other words in an expression. Only when all words are comprehended, can the intended meaning truly be understood. As such, a part of an expression can by itself signify multiple possible meanings; however, when it is related to its totality, it will become clear what an expression's true, singular signification is. As Ibn al-Anbārī vindicates Cündioğlu: one always intends one thing and not multiple things when informing someone²⁷⁰.

The natural relations of expressions

After demonstrating the untenable nature of relative meaning as well as its potential false legitimization through a misunderstanding of the status of polysemy in language, Cündioğlu delves into his own theoretical proposal of an objective Qur'an hermeneutics. As alluded to in the section on hermeneutical premises, Cündioğlu's hermeneutics is fundamentally reconstructive. In other words, the

²⁶⁹ Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 53.

²⁷⁰ Cündioğlu, 56–57.

objective meaning of a verse can be found by reconstructing its ‘natural connections’, i.e. by inquiring into questions as to what, why, by whom, and when something was stated in the Qur’an.

Towards the end of his work, Cündioğlu advances into describing these natural connections with varying degrees of details. Starting with the first connection, which is the fact that any meaningful expression, is necessarily connected to a content, the what (*ne*) of an expression. This feature of linguistic expressions is the thing that the original author wished to convey²⁷¹. As elementary as Cündioğlu’s conclusions might be, the fact remains that no understanding is possible without knowing what has been said.

According to Cündioğlu, the content of any meaningful expression is also intrinsically bound to its *raison d’être*. In other words, the what of an expression is organically bound to the *why*²⁷². An example illustrative of this is verse 2:45. This verse states: “seek (Allah’s) help with patient perseverance and prayer “. Cündioğlu argues that by understanding the reason behind this statement, which is to encourage its audience to seek help through patience and prayer, we inevitably also understand what it wishes to convey, which is nothing other than its desire that its audience seek help through patience and prayer²⁷³.

Besides the content of and motives behind an expression, it is also important to reconstruct the identity of a message’s addressees²⁷⁴. According to Cündioğlu, any variance in respect to identity assessment, will necessarily also change the outcome of an understanding. As a case in point, Cündioğlu presents verse 5:44: “And whoever does not judge according to what Allah has revealed is of the *kāfirūn*.” Customarily, *kāfirūn* is translated as “unbelievers”. Hence, argues Cündioğlu, if one

²⁷¹ Cündioğlu, 71.

²⁷² Cündioğlu, 73.

²⁷³ Cündioğlu, 73.

²⁷⁴ Cündioğlu, 80.

understands this appeal to pertain to Muslims, it would mean that any detraction from the application of the Shari'a, results in a fall from faith²⁷⁵. Historians of Islam are aware of this reading of the Qur'an, since different historical sects such as the Kharijites have advanced such an interpretation²⁷⁶. On the other hand, if the addresses are acknowledged to be the Jews of Medina, then the verse no longer has applies to Muslims.

An address also has a necessary organic relationship with a spatial-temporal context. As Cündioğlu clarifies, an address has an addressee (muhatap). However, any human addressee is bound to space and time. Accordingly, as Cündioğlu concludes, for expressions to be understandable by human beings, they have to be uttered in space and time²⁷⁷. In other words, they have to have a certain historicity to them. How we identify this spatial-temporal context will determine our understanding of an address. As Cündioğlu asserts, "Meaning is realized in adjunction with time, [meaning] receives its shape within a specific time."²⁷⁸

To prove this intrinsic relationship between the meaning of expressions and the context in which they were uttered, Cündioğlu imagines a scenario in which a Turkish reader is being confronted with the following headline: "The head scarf is gaining great popularity among high society!" Now, argues Cündioğlu, if the origin of the statement is retraced to the Turkish context of the 90s when Muslims were banned in Turkey from wearing the head scarf at universities, this statement would be met with gleeful hope. For, such a statement would signify that the secular elite, which represented high society during the 90s in Turkey, had also come to accept the head scarf; resulting thus in a broader and renewed interest in religious symbols after Turkey's growing embrace of laicity. On the other hand, if one were to contextualize this statement in reference to the end of the Ottoman era, then its

²⁷⁵ 'kāfir' in this context would refer to 'disbeliever'.

²⁷⁶ Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 82.

²⁷⁷ Cündioğlu, 83–84.

²⁷⁸ Cündioğlu, 94.

significance would more likely change from a message of hope, to a message of a foreboding future of further secularization and growth of indecent behaviour. For, as Cündioğlu states, women during Ottoman times were not only covering their heads but their whole bodies with a robe-like dress (*çarşaf*)²⁷⁹. Accordingly, the prior headline would evoke among conservatives a sentiment of regression, rather than progression as the previous example demonstrated.

The historicity of expressions necessitates that expressions have a primary addressee (*ilk muhatab*). The primary addressee is the first intended recipient of an address²⁸⁰. In the case of the Qur'an, the primary addressees are the direct witnesses of revelation. On the other hand, we – the contemporary readers - are merely recognized by Cündioğlu as the indirect addressees (*dolaylı muhatablar*) of the Qur'an. Moreover, since Cündioğlu also states that the original recipient is the cause for the inception of a message, it follows that the reconstruction of the meaning of such a message should be done in reference to how this expression would have been received historically²⁸¹. Put differently, because a message is directed and tailored towards a specific audience, it means that the significance of a message is organically bound to the capacity in which the recipient is expected to receive the message. Moreover, this also implies that a modern reader cannot derive meaning from the Qur'an that would have otherwise been historically foreign.

Cündioğlu goes even as far as to imply that no one can understand a message as well as its historical recipient. This can be inferred from the fact that Cündioğlu believes that the passage of time results in the regression (*zayıflamak*) of meaning. For, the passage of time, as Cündioğlu claims, results in “the disappearance (*kaybolmak*) of the addressee” of an expression²⁸². While Cündioğlu does not

²⁷⁹ Cündioğlu, 92–94.

²⁸⁰ Cündioğlu, 80.

²⁸¹ Cündioğlu, 80.

²⁸² Cündioğlu, 80.

further expand upon this somewhat cryptic statement, the statement can be interpreted to mean that meaning is ephemeral, since one of meaning's necessary components, a connection to an addressee, is also ephemeral (addressees die). Accordingly, it is implied that a message that was caused by someone's actions and presented during circumstances that were personally witnessed by such a person, can never be better understood by others who have no direct experience of either²⁸³.

It would only make sense to argue for the reconstruction of meaning in accordance with what the Qur'an's first audience understood, if we can admit that the Qur'an's initial audience was capable of, and had indeed, already fully understood the Qur'an. To prove this was indeed the case, Cündioğlu cites a variety of classical authorities that have argued that the Qur'an was fully understood by its initial audience. Accordingly, Ibn Khaldun, the first authority referenced by Cündioğlu, had stated in his socio-historical analysis that all classical Arabs knew the Qur'an's meaning both on a semiotic and semantic level²⁸⁴. This, as Cündioğlu's second authority Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) argues, had to be the case, because of the Quran's claim to have been revealed in order to be reflected on by its recipients. Since reflecting without understanding is impossible, it means that the first recipients were fully cognizant of the Quran's meanings²⁸⁵. As Cündioğlu puts it, to demand reflection on a message, would only make sense if one were to believe in the intelligible nature of one's message²⁸⁶.

This assumed historical capacity to understand the Qur'an is not exclusive to believers. On the contrary, Cündioğlu believes that the Qur'an was understood by non-believers and believers alike. The most explicit support Cündioğlu receives for

²⁸³ This reading is supported by another citation from Cündioğlu: "It is natural that those who were present during an event know the very things that those who were absent do not know of or have not seen." Cündioğlu, 92.

²⁸⁴ Cündioğlu, 87.

²⁸⁵ Cündioğlu, 90.

²⁸⁶ Cündioğlu, 90.

this assumption, is from the ideas of the 14th century jurist al-Shāṭibī (d. 1388). According to al-Shāṭibī the Qur'an never argued that its detractors could not understand the Qur'an but that its detractors did not will to understand the Qur'an. Al-Shāṭibī uses the following verse in support of this argument: "What is amiss with these people that they come not nigh to understand a happening?"²⁸⁷. This verse, whose linguistic intricacies will be outlined shortly, is read by al-Shāṭibī to signify the following, "This verse means that the disbelievers do not understand God's intention from His address. This verse does not mean to say that they do not understand the Word itself (*nafs al-kalām*). How could that even be the case when the Qur'an has been revealed in their language? On the contrary, they are not inclined to understand God's intention from His word."²⁸⁸ This reading, which is less straightforwardly adduced from an English translation, seems to be inferred from the fact that the Qur'an does not outright state that disbelievers do not understand what God is saying (*lā yafqahūn*); rather, the verse uses an additional verb *yakādūna* in conjunction with the verb *yafqahūn*, thereby potentially rendering the meaning in the way that Pickthall has translated it: "they come not nigh to understand". Thus, as this reading suggests and al-Shāṭibī concludes, the detractors of the Qur'an do not even attempt at (approach, "come nigh to") understanding what God is saying.

Finally, the Qur'an should also be interrogated according to Cündioğlu in respect to the mode of its expression. According to Cündioğlu, this question is a very critical question, since it pertains not to the problems surrounding the discourse of the Qur'an (e.g. its context) but directly involves the language of the Qur'an's discourse, and hence, the essence of its discourse²⁸⁹. For example, to recognize whether the Qur'an expresses by way of historical narrative or allegory, will inevitably make a great difference for the manner in which the Qur'an is interpreted²⁹⁰. A case in

²⁸⁷ Cündioğlu, 90–91.

²⁸⁸ Free translation from the Arabic edition. Abū Ishāq Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Dār Ibn 'Affān, 1997), 208.

²⁸⁹ Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 102.

²⁹⁰ Cündioğlu, 102.

point is verse 7:4, wherein the following is expressed: “And thy garments keep free from stain!”. Accordingly, argues Cündioğlu, it makes a great difference whether the call to purification is meant in a figurative or literal way. For, if it is meant literally then the object of purification is merely one’s garments, whereas if it is meant figuratively, then the object of purification can be understood to mean the soul²⁹¹.

Another important concern related to the Qur’an’s mode of expression, is whether the Qur’an should be understood as an oral or written work. In other words, as Cündioğlu wonders, whether the Qur’an should be understood as a product of ‘written language’ (*yazı dili*) or ‘spoken language’ (*konusma dili*)? For Cündioğlu the answer is clear: the Qur’an should be understood as an oral entity, rather than a written entity²⁹². Cündioğlu supports his view with a variety of arguments. First of all, argues Cündioğlu, the Qur’an was revealed to a culture that was predominantly oral in its mode of expression by a Prophet that was illiterate (*ummi*)²⁹³. It thus follows that Qur’an would reveal itself in accordance with the tradition familiar to its audience. Secondly, while it is true that there is an imperative in the Qur’an commanding to read (*iqra*), Cündioğlu argues that this command should be interpreted as “listen!”. For, argues Cündioğlu, the Qur’an explains that the reception of the Qur’an is through listening, not by reading it with our eyes: “When the Qur’an is read, listen to it with attention, and hold your peace: that ye may receive Mercy.”²⁹⁴ Hence, as Cündioğlu concludes²⁹⁵, the fact that the Qur’an speaks of an auditory relationship, is evidence of its oral nature and a refutation of

²⁹¹ Cündioğlu, 102.

²⁹² This view is congruent with the dominant Sunni tradition where it is well-known that the Qur’an was first spoken and heard, and only became codified after the passing of the Prophet. Accordingly, the primary event of revelation is oral, whereas the codex of the Qur’an is only derivative of this event.

²⁹³ Cündioğlu, *Kur’an’ı Anlama’nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 104.

²⁹⁴ Cündioğlu, 104.

²⁹⁵ It is true that the Qur’an speaks of listening to its message, but the Qur’an also speaks of being God’s *kitāb* (a term that is conventionally translated as “book”). Accordingly, one wonders how Cündioğlu reconciles these two seemingly disparate ways wherewith the Qur’an describes itself. Since Cündioğlu neglects to address this issue, his claim that the Qur’an is intrinsically oral, remains rushed and underdeveloped.

any potential understanding that argues that the Qur'an was a written report (*yazılı bildiri*)²⁹⁶.

The conclusion that the Qur'an has an oral essence might seem trivial but does have certain hermeneutical consequences. According to Cündioğlu, by accepting that the Qur'an has an oral essence and is not a literary product, we can contextualize certain features of the Qur'an that might have otherwise feel as idiosyncratic. For example, argues Cündioğlu, in a written work repetitions might seem redundant, however they are quite normal in oral discourse. A similar case might also be made for other characteristics of the Qur'an, such as its alternation between pronouns, sudden change in topics, or its answers to questions without the mention of the questions themselves²⁹⁷.

Hermeneutics in practice

Besides a few small allusions, there is only one significant example that could shed some light on how Cündioğlu's reconstructive epistemology would work in practice. The example revolves around the polysemic word *kāfirīn* present in verse 26:19: "You acted in the manner that you acted, and you are of the *kāfirīn*". This word is the plural dative of the active participle of *kafara*. *Kafara*, however, carries the following conventional significations: "to hide, cover up", "to be ungrateful", and "to disbelieve"²⁹⁸. There is without doubt a major technical difference between being ungrateful or being a disbeliever. Accordingly, it is pertinent to resolve which of the meanings is intended by the verse, for as Cündioğlu has recurrently emphasized: verses in the Qur'an do not concurrently signify different meanings.

Cündioğlu's solution to this interpretative predicament is to work through the reconstruction of the aforementioned natural connections of this verse. In other

²⁹⁶ Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 104.

²⁹⁷ Cündioğlu, 107.

²⁹⁸ Cündioğlu, 23.

words, by reconstructing the secondary references of the verse in order to advance what the original intention behind the word *kāfirīn* might have been in the context of this verse. Accordingly, the first step Cündioğlu takes is to establish the identity of the interlocutor who pronounces the statements in verse 26:19. Taking the preceding verses into account, we know that the interlocutor is the infamous Pharaoh of Egypt. As for Pharaoh's addressee, Cündioğlu identifies this person to be Moses.

Now that it is clear who the interlocutor and addressee are, Cündioğlu inquires into the moment and the circumstances in which the Pharaoh had expressed his sentiments. Accordingly, a summarized version of the Islamic account goes as follows: Moses was taken by Pharaoh's wife as an infant and raised within Pharaoh's court. After intervening in a fight between an Israelite and an Egyptian, Moses struck the Egyptian and ended his life²⁹⁹. Afraid of the repercussions, Moses fled Egypt. After building a new life for himself, Moses was approached by God and commanded to go to Pharaoh: "Go thou to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds."³⁰⁰ Thus, when Moses returned as a messenger to Pharaoh, demanding that Pharaoh release the Children of Israel, Pharaoh reminded Moses of his earlier transgression ("you acted in the manner that you acted") as well as the fact that he was of the *kāfirīn*.

To reiterate, a *kāfir* can be someone who either disbelieves or is ungrateful. However, now that we know the context of the verse, Cündioğlu argues that the most plausible meaning of *kāfir* in this context is not a disbeliever, or someone who covers up something, but an ungrateful person³⁰¹. In other words, Pharaoh wishes

²⁹⁹ See Qur'an 28:15-16: "And he entered the city at a time when its people were not watching: and he found there two men fighting,- one of his own religion, and the other, of his foes. Now the man of his own religion appealed to him against his foe, and Moses struck him with his fist and made an end of him. He said: "This is a work of Evil (Satan): for he is an enemy that manifestly misleads! He prayed: "O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul! Do Thou then forgive me!" So (Allah) forgave him: for He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

³⁰⁰ Qur'an 20:24

³⁰¹ Cündioğlu, *Kur'an'ı Anlama'nın Anlamı: Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim I*, 24.

to express how ungrateful Moses was by commanding and threatening him after all that Pharaoh had done for him by taking Moses in as a foundling and raising him within his own court.

The Evaporation of Meaning and the Qur'an

Now that Cüendioğlu's first attempt at hermeneutics has been discussed, we can advance into the fundamental theoretical propositions of his second hermeneutical work: *The Evaporation of Meaning and The Qur'an*. This work is a continuation of Cüendioğlu's first work. Nonetheless, it would be more appropriate to think of this continuation not in linear terms but in cyclical terms. Cüendioğlu embarks not on a new quest with his second work but continues on the same quest in which subjectivity in interpretation is deconstructed and a hermeneutics centred around the historical reconstruction of the authorial intent is advanced instead.

While Cüendioğlu's fundamental outlook has not changed over the course of his two works, there is arguably more attention devoted by Cüendioğlu to certain points of his theory in his second work that were previously neglected or shortly explored. In his second foray into hermeneutics, Cüendioğlu pays stronger attention to the importance of why interpretations should be objectively justifiable, what it means for the Qur'an to be a linguistic event, and what the interpretative challenges are of a diachronic reading of the Qur'an. In the proceeding sections, I will further analyse and explore these three themes in order to develop a deeper understanding of Cüendioğlu's overall hermeneutics.

Objectivity, subjectivity, and the justification of interpretations

The preface of the *Evaporation of Meaning* informs us once more of the motivations behind Cüendioğlu's involvement in hermeneutics. For Cüendioğlu, the

prime instigator behind this work has been his observation that - besides some attempts - no concrete step has as of yet been taken to escape 'the chaos' generated by what he perceives to be the subjectivist trend (*öznel(cil)lik cereyanı*) within Qur'an exegesis³⁰². What this chaos exactly entails, remains unexplained, and it is assumed that the reader already shares the same sentiment. Nevertheless, as Cündioğlu continues, attempting to discredit each individual interpretation produced by this trend in Qur'an would be highly unfeasible: "It is my contestation that the criticism of each individual interpretation is not a very constructive path in order to get ahead of this wide-spread weakness that may be called 'liberalism' or 'subjectivism'." ³⁰³ For, each critique, argues Cündioğlu, will only become but another 'interpretation amongst interpretations' (*yorumlardan bir yorum*). Rather, as Cündioğlu suggests, a more productive path would be to critically parse through the pre-understandings (*ön-anlamlar*) and presumptions (*ön-kabulleri*) that precede interpretation (*yorumlara tekaddüm eden*)³⁰⁴. Since, by inspecting the elements that precede and guide interpretation, we are able to advance a more thorough discussion that also includes the circumstances (*koşullar*) that generate disputable interpretations; important circumstances that are otherwise neglected in a purely exegetical discussion.

Conversely, in the main text itself, Cündioğlu presents a more devotional view as to why a critical hermeneutics is so important. There is no doubt that the Qur'an is fundamentally a book of guidance³⁰⁵, and hence, every Muslim tries, or should try according to Cündioğlu, to appropriate and live by its message. However, before one is able to live by the Qur'an's message, one should first be able to understand the Qur'an's message. Understanding, on the other hand, is only possible if one has knowledge of why and how (*niçin ve nasıl*) the Qur'an means what it does³⁰⁶. For, as Cündioğlu argues, without the ability to discern why and how the Qur'an means

³⁰² Cündioğlu, *Anlamin buharlaşması ve Kur'an : Hermeneutik bir deneyim II*, x-xi.

³⁰³ Cündioğlu, xi.

³⁰⁴ Cündioğlu, xi.

³⁰⁵ Cündioğlu, 4.

³⁰⁶ Cündioğlu, 7.

what it does, no certain (*kesinlik*) knowledge can be reached about one's interpretations³⁰⁷. As Cündioğlu states, "Where there is no certainty, there can be no speak of right or wrong interpretations. Let there be no doubt: when we cannot speak of right or wrong interpretations, we can also not speak of meaning!"³⁰⁸ In other words, if we have no criteria with which we can assess what the meaning of something is, we can never come to know what something actually signifies. In such a case, being ignorant of the meaning of something is no different than a scenario in which meaning did not exist at all.

Cündioğlu's second work is envisaged to succeed where a decade of understanding the Qur'an through sheer translations and exegetical works has failed. As Cündioğlu clarifies, the distance between the Qur'an and the modern subject has fundamentally enlarged and continues to do so: "neither do they [modern Muslim readers] attempt to read it nearly as much as they should, and if they read it, they do not understand it [the Qur'an]."³⁰⁹ To remedy this problem, diverse attempts were made by Turkish writers to make the Qur'an more accessible by translating both the Qur'an as well as its *tafsīr*, that is exegesis, into the Turkish language. Inevitably this led to the fact that almost any major work of *tafsīr*, even those who span dozens of volumes, to have been translated to Turkish, and countless Qur'an translations, often varying in quality, to have been made available in the Turkish language. However, as Cündioğlu argues, experience has proven that the mere access to classical exegetical works as well as Qur'an translations in one's own language, do not simply guarantee the understanding of the Qur'an, and therefore, still fail to bridge the earlier mentioned distance between the text and the contemporary reader³¹⁰. Translations do not speak to a modern audience, and the classical exegetical works provide so many different interpretations that they confuse the meaning of the Qur'an rather than clarify it³¹¹.

³⁰⁷ Cündioğlu, 7.

³⁰⁸ Cündioğlu, 7.

³⁰⁹ Cündioğlu, 4.

³¹⁰ Cündioğlu, 5.

³¹¹ Cündioğlu, 5.

These opening sections prove that Cündioğlu is an advocate of judiciously knowing why and how the Qur'an signifies a certain meaning. An important part of this knowledge is to understand the relationship between the preconceptions that we have and how they influence our subsequent interpretations. A great pedagogical effort is devoted by Cündioğlu to raise awareness amongst his readers of this relationship. However, given the predominantly Muslim character of Cündioğlu's Turkish audience, it should not come as a surprise that this effort is rooted in the discourse of classical and contemporary Islamic studies.

Cündioğlu's inculcation begins with a parallel relationship being drawn between the hermeneutical notions of preconceptions and interpretations and the classical Arabic logic of conceptions (*tasavvurat*) and judgments (*tasdikat*)³¹². As Cündioğlu recalls, the base epistemological principle of classical Islamic traditions of logic and *kalām* is the fact that "all knowledge is either conception [*tasavvur*] or assent [*tasdik*]."³¹³ Whereas conceptions pertain to terms and definitions, assents pertain to judgements and propositions³¹⁴. No scientific proposition is possible without conceptions. However, as Cündioğlu argues, there is a fundamental similarity between preconceptions and interpretations and conceptions and judgments:

"What the difference between conceptions and assents can teach us is the following. Similar to how the event of thought is realized by first proceeding from objects being conceptualized in the mind followed by these conceptions being strung together, the act of interpretation also incepts with certain presumptions that are subsequently transformed in the name of 'interpretation' into a cohesive unity."³¹⁵

In other words, interpretations are merely the logical conclusions about the meaning of things that have come together through our presumptions.

³¹² Cündioğlu, 11.

³¹³ Cündioğlu, 12.

³¹⁴ Cündioğlu, 12.

³¹⁵ Cündioğlu, 14.

This kinship between preconceptions and interpretations and conceptions and judgments also means that interpretations can be held accountable according to the integrity of their preconceptions. For, judgments can be tested according to the accuracy of the conceptions on which they are based. Accordingly, if our conceptions are incorrect, so are by extension our propositions: “When our conceptualizations are inaccurate, our propositions that exhibit judgments will inevitably also be inaccurate.”³¹⁶ Likewise, since Interpretations also express judgment concerning the meaning of something, they can also be tested in accordance with the soundness of the presuppositions undergirding their claims.

Preconceptions are for Cündioğlu more fundamental for the interpretative process than faith itself. This can be evidenced from a classical discussion that Cündioğlu recalls in which the substantiality of magic is debated. According to Cündioğlu, the dominantly held position within Sunni discourse is to accept that the magic mentioned in the Qur’an is real. However, despite being considered as one of the most important standard bearers of Sunni thinking, Abū Ḥanīfa has rejected the substantiality of magic. As such, argues Cündioğlu, Abu Ḥanīfa’s dissent is a clear example of how interpretative differences can occur even within the same religious faction. If faith was of consequence for how things are understood, then it would have implied that Abu Ḥanīfa – whose faith is indisputable in Sunni circles – would have come to the same conclusion as the Sunni majority. Since this is not the case, it means that there are other factors at play that overrule (*aşan*) mere faith (*mucerred iman kabullenışı*)³¹⁷. Cündioğlu concludes that the ultimate fate of interpretations is decided by methodology (*metodoloji*), not one’s creed (*itikad*)³¹⁸.

It is important that at every turn our preconceptions, and by extension interpretations, are based on dependable objective claims, and not on purely

³¹⁶ Cündioğlu, 13.

³¹⁷ Cündioğlu, 19.

³¹⁸ Cündioğlu, 19.

subjective impulses. To further support this argument, Cündioğlu refers once more to a classical concept in Islamic thinking called *müsellemat*.

This traditional concept of *müsellemat* can be translated in this context to mean accepted postulates. To recall, in classical dialectics a healthy disputation requires an argument that is based on postulated shared by both debaters. The theologian and encyclopaedia writer al-Jurjāni (d. 1414) presents a helpful example on the etiquette of disputation. Accordingly, al-Jurjāni argues that when a jurist argues that an adolescent girl's gold adornments can be taxed based on a solitary report (*khabarun wāḥid*) from the Prophet, the contrarian cannot simply defeat the argument by stating that he does not acknowledge this judgment, because he does not accept solitary reports. For, as al-Jurjāni argues, the admissibility of solitary reports, is an accepted interpretation principle in classical jurisprudence³¹⁹. Rather, as we can further extrapolate, if the contrarian wishes to defeat the argument, he must do so based on propositions admitted by both parties.

Cündioğlu, true to this spirit of classical dialects, argues that our interpretative claims must also be based on postulates that are not only shared but also sustainable, convincing, and true to the spirit of Islam. First of all, postulates that have been based on unquestioned falsities (*sahte bilgiler*) run the risk of being exposed one day. Interpretations that are accordingly based on such postulates, will inevitably have their rug pulled from under them³²⁰. Moreover, interpretations that lack clear and objectively proven premises, will never become potent or convincing (*ilzam edici olmaz*)³²¹. Interpretations that are only based on subjective impulses, will by their nature become withdrawn and timid, and will lose any kind of potential to be critical on account of a lack of confidence that these interpretations really do signify the ultimate truth of things. Finally, when interpretations no longer exhibit any critical fervour, they inevitably become foreign to the spirit of Islam itself. As

³¹⁹ Al-Sharīf Al-Jurjāni, *Al-Ta'rifāt* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-ilmiyah, 2000), 212.

³²⁰ Cündioğlu, *Anlamin buharlaşması ve Kur'an : Hermeneutik bir deneyim II*, 20.

³²¹ Cündioğlu, 23.

Cüendioğlu recalls, “Islam, has from its very inception expressed itself in terms of a rebellion and a challenge; being critical, opposing, dared to be criticized, and arguing that its principles could be accepted by all. What is more, it even voiced the critique of others in its own holy scripture.”³²²

The subjectivist reading is ultimately a fideist reading for Cüendioğlu. According to Cüendioğlu, when an interpretation cannot be rationalized, meaning can also not be ascertained or validated, thereby rendering our inquiries into interpretation meaningless: “This verse means such and such. Why? Because it simply does!”³²³ Such an attitude is for Cüendioğlu akin to fideism. Fideism, as Cüendioğlu describes it, “is to be closed, to have a predisposition to not openly voice one’s claims, to desire darkness, to be without claims (*iddiasizdir*), to be conservative, to be complacent, to pose no challenge, and since it does not have an open mind towards critique, it also does not like critical attitudes.”³²⁴ However, this attitude is clearly against the overall critical spirit of Islam that was previously mentioned.

Only when the rationale behind an interpretation is correct, can we really claim that an interpretation is legitimate. Otherwise, as Cüendioğlu has argued, if the rationale behind an interpretation is simply what the subject fancifully imagines, and not from a reasoned inference of what the author intends, then meaning will become ‘evaporated’³²⁵. While the metaphor of evaporation is referenced by the title of Cüendioğlu’s second work and some places by the content of his work, it is left without any concrete and detailed explanation. Nonetheless, it can be adduced from Cüendioğlu’s overall argument that this term reflects the loss³²⁶ and forgetting³²⁷ of meaning as occasioned by a theoretical renunciation, for whatever epistemological reason this may be, of the authorial intent; for, as we witnessed in

³²² Cüendioğlu, 22.

³²³ Cüendioğlu, 7.

³²⁴ Cüendioğlu, 22.

³²⁵ Cüendioğlu, 8.

³²⁶ Cüendioğlu, 54.

³²⁷ Cüendioğlu, x.

Cündioğlu's prior work, and we shall once more in his second work, meaning is inseparable from the authorial intent, and to abandon the author, is to abandon meaning all together.

The Qur'an as a linguistic event

Since understanding is structured through preconceptions, it is necessary that any proper, critical hermeneutics first establishes what its preconceptions should be. Accordingly, a Qur'an hermeneutics, must first establish what its base notions of the Qur'an are. Put differently, a critical hermeneutics needs to answer the question as to what the object is that we are understanding when we are understanding the Qur'an. However, as Cündioğlu warns us, when we try to answer this question, we must be careful not to conflate the content (*muhteva*) of the Qur'an with the (*mahiyet*) essence of the Qur'an. The Qur'an contains warnings, but this does not mean that the Qur'an is at its core a warning. Rather, as Cündioğlu will argue, "To understand the Qur'an, is to understand [in essence] a language (*lisan*) within a language; [in other words] to understand a word (*kelam*) expressed in language."³²⁸ For, the Qur'an is at its core a word (*kelam*), a discourse. It is this appellation, argues Cündioğlu, that best describes the essence (*mahiyet*), nature (*tabiyat*), and constitution (*yapi*) of the Qur'an. Whereas an attribute such as "admonisher" (*nezir*) can only describe the content and function (*işlev*) of the Qur'an³²⁹.

Alternately, our preconceptions can also be tested according in respect to whether they are analytical or synthetical. In other words, by wondering to what extent our propositional statements, when we explicate our preconceptions, state something that is inherently embedded within the term Qur'an itself. Cündioğlu's argument hearkens back to Kant's familiar distinction between analytical and synthetical

³²⁸ Cündioğlu, 26.

³²⁹ Cündioğlu, 24–25.

statements—something that Cündioğlu willingly admits. Accordingly, within a Kantian framework, predicates such as “[bachelors] are unmarried” are analytical, because they only tautologically describe what is already evident in our understanding of the term bachelor. Such predicates are independent of experience. Whereas a predicate “[a bachelor] is running outside”, is synthetic, since it depends on experience and does not relate to us something that we can infer from the term bachelor itself. Hence, when we return to Cündioğlu’s own statement that the Qur’an is a discourse, Cündioğlu argues that we are stating nothing new but are repeating an analytical description of what the Qur’an is³³⁰. This, while not an example provided by Cündioğlu, contrasts with such statements as “the Qur’an is a very relevant book in the 21st century”. The latter statement, while describing what the Qur’an is, is not an analytical statement that describes the essence of the thing itself that we can cognize independently of certain experience but is rather a synthetic statement that can only be supported by specific experiences.

Once the essence of the Qur’an is conceptualized, it is not difficult to infer from this conceptualization the direction in which our subsequent interpretations should proceed. As Cündioğlu states, “When we replace the term Qur’an for language (because it is revealed in the Arabic language) and discourse (because it is God’s word), we necessarily arrive at the means wherewith understanding is procured, [and] what kind of relationship we will have with the ‘thing’ [i.e. the Qur’an]”³³¹ In other words, by knowing that the Qur’an is a word revealed in the Arabic language, we inevitably know that we can only understand the Qur’an by understanding language itself. As Cündioğlu’s argument insinuates, had the Qur’an for example been a musical composition, it would by default mean (on account of this constitution) that we can only understand the Qur’an through hearing and by investigating the significance of sounds.

³³⁰ Cündioğlu, 26.

³³¹ Cündioğlu, 31.

Now that it is clear that the Qur'an should be considered in terms of a linguistic event, more specifically a discourse (*kelam*) expressed in language (*lisan*), we can wonder what the further hermeneutical consequences are. Accordingly, as the next sections will indicate: to understand the Qur'an, is to understand God's intent (*murad-i ilahi*). However, before we can advance into this conclusion, it is first necessary to describe the language philosophical paradigms on which Cündioğlu relies. In other words, it is first necessary to delve a bit deeper into what Cündioğlu understands when he says that the Qur'an is a discourse expressed in language.

Lisan and kelam

While the terms discourse and language were introduced by Cündioğlu in Turkish (*lisan-kelam*), there are various signs in Cündioğlu's work that demonstrate that they hearken back to, or at least converge with, the Saussurian distinction between *langue* and *parole* and the Chomskian distinction between competence and performance. This is first of all evidenced by the fact that Cündioğlu mentions *langue* in brackets together with *lisan*, while *kelam* is similarly juxtaposed with *parole*. This juxtaposition suggests that *lisan* and *kelam* are in essence synonyms of *langue* and *parole*. Moreover, when Cündioğlu delineates the concepts of *lisan* and *kelam*, he also mentions verbatim in brackets the English words competence and performance. This fact clearly demonstrates once more that Cündioğlu's ideas are rooted in certain foreign concepts; in this case being Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance. For, if they were original and organically derived from the Turkish language, there would be no reason for Cündioğlu to mention their foreign equivalents.

Saussure's impact on modern linguistics and philosophy can hardly be overlooked. Especially his distinction between *langue* and *parole* has become a staple in recent theories of deconstruction and hermeneutics. To recall, Saussure argued that

language has two aspects: langue and parole. As Chapman explains, langue “denotes a system of internalized, shared rules governing a national language’s vocabulary, grammar, and sound system”³³² On the other hand, parole signifies actual oral and written communication between members of a particular linguistic community³³³. Accordingly, to clarify this with an example, in Kurdish the first-person pronoun is always “me” in the accusative case, and “ez” in the nominative case. This rule is part of the langue of the Kurdish language. Hence, there is no possible way to switch “ez” for the accusative and “me” for the nominative without going beyond the bounds of the system in which the Kurdish language is set-up. Conversely, parole does not denote the system itself but the expressions that are formulated by putting the earlier described system into use, such as when someone says in Kurdish *ez hatim malê* (“I came home”).

It is also by extension possible to think of langue and parole in terms of competence and performance. In other words, borrowing Chomskian terms, langue represents a linguistic community’s competence. Hence, language is the competence that is ready at hand which can be utilized by members of the linguistic community in order to generate expressions. For example, English speakers all share a competence that enables them – based on a set of grammatical rules - to express declarative, interrogative, or imperative sentences. However, parole denotes the performative aspects of language, i.e. when the earlier mentioned competence to communicate interrogations or imperatives is put to use in actual conversations, poems, or literature³³⁴.

With these concepts clarified, we can turn to their hermeneutical significance in Cündioğlu’s thinking. According to Cündioğlu, meaning must be sought in the performance of language, not in the bare system of language. As Cündioğlu clarifies,

³³² Chapman, *Key Ideas in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 113

³³³ Chapman, *Key Ideas in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 113

³³⁴ Pelletier Francis Jeffry Scholz Barbara C. and Geoffrey K Pullum, “Philosophy of Linguistics,” ed. Edward N Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016).

“For meaning, to repeat once more, is more so found in the use of language, than language itself. Whereas language is a possibility, desire (*istem*) is its necessary condition. In other words, meaning is not in language, in the general knowledge thereof, but hidden in the purpose (*maksad*) and intention (*murad*) of the speaker of that language.”³³⁵ By itself, language is merely ready at hand, unspecified, and incapable in defining meaning (*tayin etmez*)³³⁶ However, language performance, e.g. speaking, is what brings meaning about, because one utilizes language in order to convey a meaning, an intent³³⁷. For example, the word “mouse” can either refer to an animal or a computer peripheral. It is by virtue of the technician’s desire to speak of the peripheral that the word mouse means a peripheral and not a type of animal.

As with all of his modern arguments, Cündioğlu also finds support from classical Islamic literature. Accordingly, Cündioğlu puts his more conservative readers to ease by also locating the traditional Islamic equivalents of the earlier mentioned langue-parole paradigm. The traditional concepts that Cündioğlu recalls in this regard are *muvâdaa* (convention) and *kasd’ul-mütekellim* (authorial intent). The reference made to tradition in this case is interestingly not to the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition, which has been historically the dominant intellectual tradition in Turkey, but the Mu’tazilīs, which are considered customarily to have been a heterodox sect in Islam. The Mu’tazilīs, as Cündioğlu points out, had argued that the understanding of the Qur’an always depends on two variables: *muvâdaa* and *kasd’ul-mütekellim*. One must first of all be aware of *muvâdaa*. *Muvâdaa* defines what expressions customarily signify, which also includes whether certain expressions were conventionally known to be used literally or metaphorically³³⁸. In other words, *muvâdaa* is the langue, the system of a language. However, knowing *muvâdaa* is not enough by itself, for one must also infer (*istidlāl*) the *kasd’ul-mütekellim*

³³⁵ Cündioğlu, *Anlamin buharlaşması ve Kur’an : Hermeneutik bir deneyim II*, 44.

³³⁶ Cündioğlu, 43.

³³⁷ Cündioğlu, 44.

³³⁸ Cündioğlu, 45.

(authorial intent). Since, it is the interlocutor that decides how to utilize (perform) language in order to convey an intention³³⁹.

The *kasd'ul-mütekellim* is more fundamental than the *muvâdaa*. Without actually being performed, words can mean in their potential and neutral state a variety of things that are compliant with the rules of the system. Accordingly, the system itself cannot be the final arbiter in deciding what something means. Rather, as Cündioğlu has recurrently emphasized, it is the intent of the author that decides how a potential meaning is actualized in speech. Cündioğlu further clarifies this point with a discussion from al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) works. As al-Ghazālī pointed out, the Arabic word *fawq* can signify either elevation in rank or elevation in physical space. However, we can wonder which of these meanings is used by the Qur'an when the Qur'an states: "He is the irresistible, (watching) from above [*fawq*] over His worshippers"³⁴⁰. Is God above believers in physical space or in rank? For Cündioğlu the answer can only be resolved by taking into account what the authorial intent could have been. In this case, given the premise that God is absolutely transcendent, al-Ghazālī and Cündioğlu have concluded that God could not have meant that He is elevated in physical space, since that would anthropomorphise God and diminish His transcendence. Accordingly, *fawq* can only be sensibly understood as elevated in rank, for that is more fitting of God's intention³⁴¹.

³³⁹ Cündioğlu, 45–46.

³⁴⁰ Qur'an 6:61

³⁴¹ This is veritably a rationalist perspective on the matter, whereby reason dictates the most appropriately rational signification a polysemic expression might have. In this case undercutting potentially anthropomorphic significations that *fawq* has. However, this approach to expressions in the Qur'an has also been contested by other scholars, such as the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). As Ibn Taymiyya states, "The Creator, glorious and exalted is He, is elevated in a real manner above the world, not elevated in rank" (*wa al-bāri'u subḥānahu wa ta'ālā fawqa al-'ālamī fawqīyyatan ḥaqīqatan wa laysat fawqīyya al-rutbatī*). Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān Al-Talbīs Al-Jahmiyya*, vol. 1 (Madina: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li Tibā'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 2005), 390.

Understanding can thus only succeed by reconstructing an expression according to its original intention. Cündioğlu recalls the position of Schleiermacher in this respect: “Every event of understanding, according to Schleiermacher, has its counterpart in the event of the word; for understanding, is nothing more than the reconstruction of the saying of the interlocutor by the addressee.”³⁴² As a consequence, understanding is not an activity in which new meanings are sought or creative readings are developed³⁴³. Rather, as Cündioğlu makes it adamantly clear, “Understanding is a second reconstruction³⁴⁴, a new realization; wherein an understanding subject tries to figure out in language how the original constitution [i.e. word] of the speaking subject was realized and realizes it anew in accordance with its essence.”³⁴⁵

The diachronic aspects of understanding

Cündioğlu’s theory has certain diachronic implications. As the prior section argued, to understand is to reconstruct an expression in reference to its original intention. However, as Cündioğlu points out, this reconstruction is not purely linguistic (*dilsel*) but also historical (*tarihsel*)³⁴⁶. For starters, as the *lisan-kelam* paradigm clarified, meaning is realized in relation to a linguistic system. However, the system behind language is always evolving and changing, and thus, in possession of different historical states (diachroneity). Accordingly, when we reconstruct the meaning of an expression, we must pay careful attention to the particular system that was in place during the time that the expression was first uttered³⁴⁷. Otherwise, as we can surmise, our interpretations run the risk of ascribing a meaning that might have been current at one stage in history but foreign to the language of a work in another stage.

³⁴² Cündioğlu, *Anlamin buharlaşması ve Kur’an : Hermeneutik bir deneyim II*, 53.

³⁴³ Cündioğlu, 53.

³⁴⁴ This English phrase is directly derived from Cündioğlu’s text.

³⁴⁵ Cündioğlu, *Anlamin buharlaşması ve Kur’an : Hermeneutik bir deneyim II*, 54.

³⁴⁶ Cündioğlu, 63.

³⁴⁷ Cündioğlu, 47–48.

Given this hermeneutical premise, the interpretation of the Qur'an also requires a competent knowledge of how words were used during the period of the Qur'an's revelation. However, this leads us to a follow-up question as to whether there is proper and sufficient historical data to allow for a proper diachronic reading of the Qur'an? Based on the findings by the recent Egyptian scholar al-Khulī (d. 1966), Cündioğlu has no choice but to accept that existent lexicons have failed in providing a helpful record of the diachronic aspects of the Arabic language. According to al-Khulī, even very renowned lexicons such as the *Lisān al-'Arab* and the *Qamūs al-Muḥīṭ* have just aimlessly collected the various meanings between words, relating meanings from sources that were ages and cultures apart³⁴⁸.

The lack of proper data on the diachrony of words, undoubtedly creates a hermeneutical conundrum. As Cündioğlu relates, al-Khulī himself conceded to the fact that extant dictionaries were of little help for establishing the diachrony behind meanings. Accordingly, a modern exegete has for al-Khulī by default no choice but to reconstruct the historicity behind words³⁴⁹. After diligently reconstructing the various meanings behind words to the best of his knowledge, al-Khulī argues that the exegete should relate his findings to the Qur'an itself. How one should subsequently relate the Qur'an is not entirely clear from al-Khulī's words. Moreover, unlike his previous work, Cündioğlu also does not divulge into what a proper answer to this question might be. However, given the previous example on whether God was above humans in rank or physical space, we can only surmise that words can be tested to be true to the Qur'an if we can somehow make a rational case as to why God would purport this meaning of a word versus another historically potential meaning. For, in Cündioğlu's system, as we have repeatedly seen, meaning is constituted by the objective intent behind expressions, and not by

³⁴⁸ Cündioğlu, 48–49.

³⁴⁹ Cündioğlu, 49.

the potential, polysemic significance words might have.

Conclusory remarks

Cündioğlu is an ardent advocate for objectivism in Qur'an hermeneutics, that much should be clear by now. However, it does not by necessity mean that Cündioğlu is against understanding the Qur'an in differing ways. This might seem like a counterintuitive assertion, given that the starting point of objectivity is to reclaim a meaning that is singular and distinctly true to the original intention of the text. However, Cündioğlu's conservatism, and thus, reverence of the different legal schools in Islam, all of which are known for their divergent understandings of the Qur'an, evidences that the advocacy for objectivity does not by default preclude the tolerance for multiple readings of the Qur'an. Rather, it is my conclusion that the actual aim of Cündioğlu's advocacy of objectivism, is to insulate the Qur'an and Muslims from theories and readings that argue that the Qur'an intends concurrently different things to different subjects. In other words, as all the previous sections recurrently demonstrated, Cündioğlu is principally against a meaning relativism that accepts all understandings and interpretations as equally valid and indicative of God's intention, and not – as his works might insinuate – against the co-existence of different applications and interpretations of the Qur'an in the larger Muslim community.

This attitude towards objectivity and relativism in Qur'an hermeneutics and exegesis, expels on the one hand all readings of the Qur'an that are unfounded and flimsy, but it also creates a clearing for disputation in exegesis that is open to non-believers.

Cündioğlu's objectivism centres around the authorial intent (*kasd'ul-mütekellim*). In the case of the Qur'an this is conventionally believed by Muslims to be what God intended with His revelation. Accordingly, in Cündioğlu's framework, valid

interpretations of the Qur'an have to always aim at disclosing God's intent. However, Cündioğlu requires that these interpretations are rationally justifiable. One simply cannot argue that they understand a verse in a certain manner just because they "feel or believe it to be so". Interpretations that lack rational justification are according to Cündioğlu unsustainable and contradict the overall spirit of the Qur'an. For, as Cündioğlu argued, readings that are simply based on subjective whims rather than solid rational foundations, are always a hair length away from being exposed of being incorrect and unfounded. Moreover, these kinds of interpretations are weak and unconvincing, since they rely on private sentiments, rather than universal rational grounds. The reliance on private sentiments contradicts the overall spirit of the Qur'an who revealed a message that was meant to be convincing to and intelligible by everyone, including disbelievers. As such, we must conclude that in Cündioğlu's framework the capacity for understanding is not grounded in subjective faith but objective reason.

This need for interpretations to be rationally justifiable, creates by implication a space for disputation in exegesis. In other words, Muslims may entertain different interpretations, but always in a manner that they can explain why they hold these interpretations, rather than other competing interpretations. Moreover, since the capacity for understanding is not grounded in subjective faith, but objective reason. It means by extension that any non-Muslim can partake in writing an exegesis of the Qur'an as long as they too can justify on reasonable grounds why their explanation of the Qur'an holds true.

Subjective Bearing is More Fundamental to Understanding than Objective Method: The Hermeneutics of Recep Alpyağıl

Introduction

Born in 1977 in Samsun as the son of the local imam³⁵⁰, Alpyağıl's formal religious education began in 1998 when he attended one of the traditional religious lyceums (*Imam hatip lisesi*) in Turkey. To recall the first chapter, the Imam-Hatip schools were designed to groom the next generation of religious clergy—a task previously carried by the currently defunct madrasas. However, after finishing a religious lyceum, one could also, as Alpyağıl did, advance further into one of Turkey's theological universities (*ilahiyat fakültesi*). As such, after obtaining a bachelor and master's degree in theology, Alpyağıl wrote a doctoral thesis for Istanbul University titled *Din Felsefesinde Dekonstrüksiyon* (Deconstruction in the Philosophy of Religion). Having received his doctoral degree, Alpyağıl started teaching and researching for his alma mater Istanbul University, which he continues to this day.

As an author, Alpyağıl possesses an impressive oeuvre, comprising a wide range of – mainly – Turkish contributions to the philosophy of religion. These works can accordingly be divided into three categories: monographs on certain thinkers, comparative and dialectical analyses of different thinkers, and Alpyağıl's own ideas. It is especially in the last two categories that we discover the broad range of Alpyağıl's knowledge and an explicit mediating engagement between both Islamic ideas and contemporary Western philosophy. Articles such as *Faslu'l-Makâl'i Wittgensteinci Bir Bağlamda Okumak* (Reading [Averroes'] Decisive Treatise from a Wittgenstenian perspective) or *Trying to Understand Whitehead in the Context of*

³⁵⁰ İbrahim Türkan, "Prof. Recep Alpyağıl ile Kütüphane Sohbeti," 2019, <https://www.ilimdergisi.org/kitap-sohbetleri/prof-recep-alpyagil-ile-kutuphane-sohbetleri/>.

*Ibn 'Arabi*³⁵¹, are but a few examples of the cross-cultural nature of Alpyağıl's intellectual activities.

Despite the broad range of Alpyağıl's writings, two works primarily represent Alpyağıl's own hermeneutical thinking, and will be the primary focus of this chapter. These two works, which shall be described shortly, contain a collection of essays, both constituting earlier published essays as well as new essays. The first work in question is titled *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik? Kur'anı Anlama Yolunda Felsefi Denemeler I* (Whose History, Which Hermeneutics? Philosophical Experiments in Understanding the Qur'an I). This work revolves primarily around Alpyağıl's own ideas. His second work, on the other hand, is titled *Fark Ve Yorum: Kur'an'ı Anlama Yolunda Felsefi Denemeler II* (Difference and Interpretation: Philosophical Experiments in Understanding the Qur'an II), and contains besides Alpyağıl's own ideas, also essays dedicated to reviewing the work of other thinkers.

Alpyağıl describes his interest in hermeneutics in the preface to his first work. According to Alpyağıl, contemporary thought is marked by a fundamental turn to language, known as the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy. The linguistic turn has disturbed the self-evident nature of what we understand as a text and has reinitiated inquiries into the status of the text, the essence of meaning, the relationship between text and history, and the relationship between the text and the reader³⁵². With regard to the latter, Alpyağıl claims similar to Cündioğlu that contemporary hermeneutical thinking has become biased towards taking the subjective reader as the referent of meaning (*okur yanlı*), rather than the objective meaning of the text, as classical hermeneutics used to do³⁵³. Neither opting for a radical subjectivism nor a so-called objectivism, Alpyağıl wants to explore to what extent it is possible to maintain a hermeneutical position that allows for both

³⁵¹ This title is one of the few English written articles by Alpyağıl.

³⁵² Recep Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1* (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2013), 7.

³⁵³ Alpyağıl, 7.

approaches to operate simultaneously (*eş zamanlı*)³⁵⁴. In other words, Alpyağıl aims to contribute to the ongoing hermeneutical discussions by trying to find a middle way (*arabulucu olmak*)³⁵⁵. For, it is only by finding a middle way, argues Alpyağıl, that we can hope to escape the otherwise inevitable reductionism (*indermegecilik*) that a radical objectivism or subjectivism fall prey to³⁵⁶.

In a 2019 interview, however, Alpyağıl provides a more personal recollection of his first foray into hermeneutics. Alpyağıl states in this interview, that the previously mentioned work *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik? Kuranı Anlama Yolunda Felsefi Denemeler I*, was influenced by the quest to find an answer to the questions that were stirring inside himself. As Alpyağıl recalls:

“For example, one of the works that I published was my book *Kimin Tarihi? Hangi Hermenötik?* This work that comprises philosophical attempts at understanding the Qur’an, was a kind of conversation, a reckoning – without differentiating between the first or second person— that I had with the person in my mind. When that book was born, the most discussed topics in the field of theology (*ilahiyat sahasında*) were questions pertaining to such issues as how the Qur’an should be understood, whether the Qur’an was historical or not, and what kind of stance one ought to take in hermeneutical discussions. These discussions were also demanding an answer from me. It is possible to consider (*telakki etmek*) this book as a response [to these problems].”³⁵⁷

Unlike Cündioğlu’s staunch objectivism discussed in the previous chapter, Alpyağıl notes the limitations of an objectivist Qur’an hermeneutics in a few substantial ways. While Alpyağıl acknowledges the importance of a rule-based approach to hermeneutics, he simultaneously argues that understanding cannot always be

³⁵⁴ Alpyağıl, 7. “Alpyağıl does not wish to eliminate either the subjective or objective elements which may factor into an interpretative act. He recognizes that a reader’s context is essential to meaning, but he also does not wish to reduce textual interpretation to subjective relativity.” Taraneh Wilkinson, *Dialectical Encounters: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 68.

³⁵⁵ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 7.

³⁵⁶ Unfortunately Alpyağıl does not give examples of which authors might have succumbed to a radical objectivism or subjectivism, only that he specifically does not want to fall into the trappings of either. Alpyağıl, 7–8.

³⁵⁷ Türkan, “Prof. Recep Alpyağıl ile Kütüphane Sohbeti.”

realized through the static application of rules. First, because of the text's nature to elude any static, recurrent identification of meaning by virtue of its ambiguous character. Second, because the text only discloses its full meaning to readers that fulfil a set of subjective preconditions. For example, without subjective variables, such as faith, empathy, imagination, or existential humility, it is not possible to fully understand the Qur'an.

In the next sections, we will discuss in more depth how Alpyağıl tries to manage his dual commitment to objective rules as well as subjective experiences in interpreting the Qur'an. This discussion will mainly revolve around four important essays written by Alpyağıl.

The problem of private language and subjectivist Qur'an readings

One of the first major essays where Alpyağıl explores the dialectics of objectivity-subjectivity and the status of the subject's role in interpreting the Qur'an is in a work focused on the problem of private language. With private language, Alpyağıl is referring to a language that is exclusively understood by one person³⁵⁸. Alpyağıl, wants to explore whether such a language can exist. At first instance, this problem might seem unrelated to the problem of Qur'an hermeneutics, but as Alpyağıl states: "If a language can only be a communicative medium under certain conditions, then, in a similar fashion, giving meaning to a Qur'an that presents a message in a language, is also bound to certain conditions."³⁵⁹ In other words, whatever we understand language to be in its limitations and possibilities, will have consequences to how we relate to the Qur'an, since the Qur'an is a message expressed in language. For example, if we conclude that significations are only meaningful in a language if they are established in relation to fixed objective grounds (e.g. by following communal rules of a language), we simply cannot make a

³⁵⁸ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 27.

³⁵⁹ Alpyağıl, 27.

justified case for an interpretation of the Qur'an that is purely based on volatile, subjective convictions. However, on the other hand, if language always eludes the possibility of conveying objective meaning, then we cannot but interpret everything subjectively, nor be blamed for doing so.

Alpyağıl's discussion of the private language problem begins with recalling some of the later Wittgenstein's examination of language found in the *Philosophical Investigations*. The first relevant discussion mentioned by Alpyağıl concerns the question of whether it is possible for someone to name his or her private sensations in a meaningful way without taking recourse to a pre-established language. According to Alpyağıl's reading of Wittgenstein this is not possible:

"What would it be like if human beings did not manifest their pains (did not groan, grimace, etc.)? Then it would be impossible to teach a child the use of the word 'toothache'." – Well, let's assume that the child is a genius and invents a name for the sensation by himself! – But then, of course, he couldn't make himself understood when he used the word. – So does he understand the name, without being able to explain its meaning to anyone? – But what does it mean to say that he has 'named his pain'? – How has he managed this naming of pain? And whatever he did, what was its purpose? – When one says "He gave a name to his sensation", one forgets that much must be prepared in the language for mere naming to make sense. And if we speak of the someone's giving a name to a pain, the grammar of the word "pain" is what has been prepared here; it indicates the post where the new word is stationed."³⁶⁰

This, very dense philosophical inquiry by Wittgenstein, is unpacked by Alpyağıl to imply two important conclusions. First of all, a private denotation of a sensation can never be meaningful to others on account of its reference being constricted to the private knowledge of someone³⁶¹. Others will never come to know what the sensation of a hypothetical private language user truly is, because they only have their own communal language to go by to communicate, and inversely understand,

³⁶⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. P.M.S Hacker and Joachim Schulte, 4th ed. (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 98e; Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 29.

³⁶¹ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 29.

such a sensation. Accordingly, any arbitrary denotation that circumvents a pre-established communal language, as hypothetical private language users do, can never be meaningful to them. Secondly, as the latter half of Wittgenstein's citation indicated, one cannot begin to name things – even privately – without already being acquainted with a language³⁶². As Alpyağıl concludes, naming is always done against the 'stage-setting' (*sahne dekoru*) of language, that is in reference to prior fixed references and rules³⁶³. As such, this implies that even a private language user cannot create, and inversely understand, his own private denotations without starting from a pre-established language.

In further clarification of the last point, Alpyağıl argues that even if were to assume that someone circumvented a pre-established language to privately conceive references that signify private sensations, that person would still be confronted with the inability to recurrently identify whether new experiences are indeed recurrent experiences signified by the earlier mentioned self-conceived references. In other words, as Alpyağıl questions: "If a person has not learned to bring words together in a specific rule-based manner, how would he be able to know that his current sensation is equal to the sensation he experienced last Wednesday?"³⁶⁴ Alpyağıl would argue that this is impossible, since, as Wittgenstein has reasoned, such a person lacks a pre-established reference wherewith the criterion for correct identification of sense can be established: "But in the present case [i.e. in the case of privately conceived references] I have no criterion for correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'correct'."³⁶⁵ Since privately conceived references to sense lack an objective criterion wherewith they can be recurrently identified, it is not possible to be sure that recurrent instances of an experience are signified by the

³⁶² Alpyağıl, 30.

³⁶³ Alpyağıl, 30.

³⁶⁴ Alpyağıl, 31.

³⁶⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 99e; Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 31–32.

earlier, privately constructed references; which hinders self-conceived references from being persistent signifiers both to the self and others.

After having overweighed Wittgenstein's remarks, Alpyağıl extrapolates a set of generic postulates concerning the nature of language. The first postulate states that language has a complex structure (*yapı*) that prevents it from being confined (*hapisedilemeyecek*) to pure subjective constraints³⁶⁶. Wittgenstein's remarks on the incongruity of private denotation, have demonstrated that it was impossible for the subject to arbitrarily denote something. Rather, as Alpyağıl concludes, the internal structure of language transcends the subject and always receives its meaning from a collective (*toplumsal*) level³⁶⁷. Accordingly, proper sense references cannot be conceived by mere subjective fancy, or in the words of Alpyağıl: "A person cannot create a connection between a word and its object through some fancy prestidigitation (*hokkabazlık*)"³⁶⁸. The second postulate, which continues the first, admits that language has to be based on a consensus, that is on objective rules whereupon agreement rests³⁶⁹. For, as the previous discussion demonstrated, the meaning of something necessarily depends on the ability to recurrently identify this meaning, which is only possible if meaning is related to subject independent rules.

Alpyağıl's second postulate receives further conceptual clarification in light of Searle's views on the interconnection between language and constitutive rules. To clarify, according to Searle there are two types of rules: constitutive and regulative. When rules regulate pre-established activities, they are called regulative, whereas when they establish whether a given act constitutes an activity, they are called constitutive. Alpyağıl, further illuminates this distinction by referring to two examples from Searle: handing out wedding invitations and playing football³⁷⁰. As Alpyağıl recounts, by law of custom, one is supposed to send out wedding

³⁶⁶ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 34.

³⁶⁷ Alpyağıl, 34.

³⁶⁸ Alpyağıl, 34.

³⁶⁹ Alpyağıl, 35.

³⁷⁰ Alpyağıl, 40.

invitations at least two weeks in advance. However, while this rule does regulate the activity of sending wedding invitations, it does not constitute the activity, as it is quite possible to send out wedding invitations in a world where this rule did not exist. On the other hand, if there were no football rules, there would be no speak of playing football:

“It is possible that twenty-two men might go through the same physical movements as are gone through by two teams at a football game, but if there were no rules of football, that is, no antecedently existing game of football, there is no sense in which their behavior could be described as playing football.”³⁷¹ Hence, as both examples can be further generalized, regulative rules often take the form of “perform X!”, or if “Y is the case, then perform X”. While, constitutive rules take the form of “X counts as Y”, or “in the context of C, X counts as Y”³⁷².

Language also involves constitutive rules³⁷³. Rather than fully explaining the connection between language and constitutive rules, Alpyağıl hints at the fact that promises are a demonstration of how constitutive rules relate to language use³⁷⁴. To clarify Alpyağıl’s reference to promises further, we can turn to the self-evident fact that promises only become realised when certain rules are followed. As Searle puts it, one can only promise something when a promising device specific to convention is utilized in order to undertake a matter of obligation³⁷⁵. For example, when someone states in English “I promise to wash the car”. One simply cannot randomly pronounce utterances and expect to signify a promise. Likewise, as I would like to call attention to religious language use, there are specific rules that constitute the pronunciation of a blessing. For example, in Arabic – customarily – Muslims will pronounce a blessing by specifically adhering to a set of phrases, such as *mabrūk* or *barakāllah*. A meaningful blessing cannot become constituted in Arabic other than by referring to such pre-established conventions.

³⁷¹ John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, 34th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 35–36; Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 40–41.

³⁷² Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 40.

³⁷³ Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, 37.

³⁷⁴ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 41.

³⁷⁵ Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, 40.

Having clarified his basic preconceptions concerning language, Alpyağıl further ventures into relating these preconceptions to the problem of Qur'an hermeneutics. Alpyağıl commences his discussion on how the private language problem relates to the issue of Qur'an hermeneutics, with the introduction of a few contemporary, primarily scientist and anachronistic, readings of the Qur'an. One noteworthy example recounted by Alpyağıl pertains to verse 29:19. This verse is conventionally interpreted as follows: "See they not how Allah originates creation, then repeats it: truly that is easy for Allah." However, a contemporary Turkish interpretation which Alpyağıl cites, introduces a very contemporary vocabulary to the verse: "Do they not scientifically research nature that turns green and withers? How God makes the DNA seed absorb and exhort energy?"³⁷⁶ Such contemporary readings, according to Alpyağıl, while not consciously motivated by a theory of private language, are in practice nevertheless akin to private language use³⁷⁷. Primarily, because such readings are deemed by Alpyağıl to be arbitrary, without displaying any consideration of how and where the words in the Qur'an were originally used or the rules that gave shape to their original meaning³⁷⁸. In other words, by ignoring the linguistic horizon (*dilsel zemin*)³⁷⁹ wherein the Qur'an was originally revealed, these interpretations are inevitably circumventing the language in which the Qur'an was revealed in favour of the interpreter's own arbitrary interpretations; which, is in the end no different than if the interpreter would have ascribed meaning to the Qur'an based on his own private language.

Alpyağıl challenges interpretations based on arbitrary uses of language with a variety of arguments. First, Alpyağıl believes that the linguistic horizon of a given text, should be in any case the base reference when interpreting the text in consideration³⁸⁰. As Wittgenstein had argued elsewhere, meaning is constituted in

³⁷⁶ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 47.

³⁷⁷ Alpyağıl, 46.

³⁷⁸ Alpyağıl, 48.

³⁷⁹ Alpyağıl, 46.

³⁸⁰ Alpyağıl, 48.

use, and signs receive their meaning within a context³⁸¹. Moreover, the rules that regulate a language come to be and receive their meaning through certain institutions³⁸². Accordingly, to ignore the linguistic horizon wherein a text came to be, will result in certain anachronistic absurdities. For example, as Alpyağıl argues, to claim that Aladdin's lamp was not a mysterious lamp but a device that worked according to the second principle of thermodynamics and who could bend the space-time continuum, is inevitably to remove it from its original life form and language game; since, modern science and its terminology had not been invented at the time the Thousand and One Nights was written³⁸³. Similarly, to argue that the poet Woodsworth was referring to a sexual orientation when saying that a poet could not be gay, is equally anachronistic, as the term gay originally had different connotations, such as being happy, and only came to be referring to a sexual orientation in recent times³⁸⁴.

Anachronistic interpretations of the Qur'an that are laden with modern scientific terminology are according to Alpyağıl abstracted from their original language game. According to Alpyağıl, substituting the original 6th and 7th century Arabic words for contemporary scientific terms, is akin to changing chess pieces for checker stones. In such an instance, the status of the individual chess pieces would change dramatically in their significance. When substituted for a simple checker stone, the king piece would no longer be a king at all³⁸⁵, and therefore, receive a completely different meaning in chess. Similarly, to substitute an Arabic word from the 7th century for a contemporary scientific term in a Qur'an verse as the earlier translation of verse 29:19 demonstrated, would equally drastically alter the meaning of the verse in question. For, such a substitution would anachronistically allow the Qur'an to be speaking of DNA and photosynthesis.

³⁸¹ Alpyağıl, 38.

³⁸² Alpyağıl, 39.

³⁸³ Alpyağıl, 48.

³⁸⁴ Alpyağıl, 49.

³⁸⁵ Alpyağıl, 49.

Alpyağıl also challenges such anachronistic readings in reference to the earlier discussed identification principle of language. If an interpreter can only rationalize his interpretation on subjective grounds, as Alpyağıl claims certain contemporary Qur'an interpreters do, it follows that there would be no external, static reference wherewith meaning is recurrently guaranteed. As such, as Alpyağıl argues, if certain Qur'an verses meant one thing in the past, and something else in the present, what prevents these verses from gaining another new meaning for a future audience?³⁸⁶ One might, as Alpyağıl rightfully notes, argue that such interpretations are indicators of a surplus of meaning (*anlam zenginliği*)³⁸⁷. However, Alpyağıl finds this to be naïve, since the actual outcome of such a hermeneutical outlook and practice is not the constructive surplus of meaning but the very destruction of communication (*iletişim tahribi*)³⁸⁸. As Aristotle had stated, "For not to have one meaning is to have no meaning, and if words have no meaning there is an end of discourse with others, and even, strictly speaking, with oneself; because it is impossible to think of anything if we do not think of one thing"³⁸⁹. In other words, if an understanding of the Qur'an lacks any fixed meaning that can be recurrently referenced throughout time, a verse would be able to mean one thing while simultaneously also meaning its opposite, and therefore, lose meaning altogether.

Up to this point, Alpyağıl has only argued in favour of an objectivist view of Qur'an hermeneutics. However, as stated in the introduction, Alpyağıl intends to find a position that goes beyond a pure objectivism or subjectivism. Accordingly, after establishing the importance of the objective aspects to understanding, Alpyağıl starts to move his arguments in the opposite direction: in favour of a constructive integration of subjectivity in Qur'an hermeneutics. First of all, Alpyağıl reminds us that conventions and rules are contingent on how they are subjectively understood by a community. A religious text can express the same imperative to be generous to

³⁸⁶ Alpyağıl, 50.

³⁸⁷ Literally signifying 'meaning richness'.

³⁸⁸ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik?* : *Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 50.

³⁸⁹ Aristotle, *The Metaphysics: Books I-IX*, 167; Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik?* : *Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 50.

each successive generation of readers, but what generosity truly entails for this community of readers, is dependent upon contingent and context specific circumstances in which the text's readership lives. Second, not all hermeneutical problems are occasioned, nor solved for that manner, by our relationship to the text: "To give meaning to a text rules are necessary but not sufficient."³⁹⁰ Rather, there are also certain hermeneutical problems that originate – naturally as Alpyağıl would argue— from the text itself³⁹¹. In fact, Alpyağıl argues, even the Qur'an itself has admitted not to be entirely unequivocal (*muhkem*)³⁹². In other words, the ambiguous elements of the Qur'an prevent a wholesale objectivist theoretical approach, as the nature of the text itself resists continuous recurrent identification of the same sense³⁹³.

To return to the relationship between language and rule-following, Alpyağıl argues elsewhere that the necessity to follow rules does not entirely discard the role of subjective interpretation. Alpyağıl demonstrates this with a poignant example from the Qur'an. Accordingly, verse 25:67 reminds us that God favours those who "when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes)". However, argues Alpyağıl, whether one is considered to be extravagant or niggardly, is dependent upon a variety of contingent factors³⁹⁴. For example, the amount of expenditure that is seen as extravagance could well be seen according to the standards of another culture as a very modest or even niggardly consumption. Hence, while objectively speaking a believer cannot be extravagant, as the verse clearly emphasizes 'they are not extravagant', the parameters that define what extravagance is, are subjective.

³⁹⁰ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 53.

³⁹¹ Alpyağıl, 52.

³⁹² Alpyağıl is referring to the Qur'an's self-description as expressed in such verses as 3:7: "He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning) [*muhkamāt*]; they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical [*mutashabihāt*]." Alpyağıl, 52.

³⁹³ Alpyağıl, 53.

³⁹⁴ Alpyağıl, 20–21.

The previous discussion demonstrates that the application of rules cannot avoid the interpretation of rules according to circumstances. However, as Alpyağıl concludes, the interpretation of rules always demands practical wisdom on behalf of the subject, or in Aristotelian terms, *phronesis* (prudence)³⁹⁵. To describe prudence, Alpyağıl refers to Macintyre's definition that prudence is "the virtue of practical intelligence, of knowing how to apply to general principles in particular situations."³⁹⁶ Accordingly, to add credence to Alpyağıl's arguments, we know that the general principle behind extravagance, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, is the "behaviour in which you spend more money than you need to". However, what constitutes the conditions for 'more than you need to', is without doubt dependent upon the particularities that pertain to a given situation and the subject's ability to recognize these properly. As such, only a prudent person is able to properly interpret the abstract principle of extravagance in light of the particularities of that situation and guard himself against squandering.

While it is true that the interpretation of rules is contingent and subjective, it does not however mean that all subjective interpretations are by default valid. On the contrary, Alpyağıl argues that the final judgment on whether a rule is properly followed rests in the hands of the community. As Alpyağıl states, "When a rule is to be followed, it is possible that a subjective interpretation is needed. However, this subjectivity does not fall outside communal supervision. If one may say so, the subjective interpretation must be acquitted (*temize çıkması gerekir*) by the community."³⁹⁷ Hence, if we are to return once more to the imperative of avoiding extravagance in the Qur'an, we know that each person can interpret the imperative of not being extravagant according to changing circumstances. However, it is not the person but the community to which the person belongs that can vindicate his or her interpretation of what might customarily constitute extravagant behaviour.

³⁹⁵ Alpyağıl, 22.

³⁹⁶ Alisdair Macintyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 74; Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 22.

³⁹⁷ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 24.

Besides rule-following, the Qur'an also eludes absolute objectivity by being partially ambiguous in nature. There are certain subjects in the Qur'an "that cannot be interpreted with certainty in one single try. It is by design very difficult to arrive at an interpretation of these subjects that can convince everyone equally."³⁹⁸ Alpyağıl presents two examples in this regard. The first example pertains to the fact that the Qur'an contains otherworldly (*öte dünya*) descriptions and metaphors (*benzetmeler*). While Alpyağıl does not relate any particular examples from the Qur'an, it is not difficult to assume that Alpyağıl is referring to the many verses concerning the theological concepts of the Unseen (*al-ghayb*) or the Hereafter. For example, the Qur'an states: "Near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass. Near it is the Garden of Abode."³⁹⁹ One can question whether the Qur'an is referring to a metaphorical or a real tree? Moreover, we can wonder why it is specifically a lote-tree that stands near paradise and not some other tree? The second example, which inevitably continues the discussion above, refers to the narratives of the Qur'an wherein the Qur'an also employs certain imagery (*tasvir dili*)⁴⁰⁰. An example referred to, but not further detailed by Alpyağıl, is *sūra Kahf*⁴⁰¹. For Alpyağıl the degree in which the Qur'an has used univocal or metaphorical language in such narratives is unclear. Accordingly, it is not possible to make a wholesale claim (*bütünüyle*) about the reality or fictitious nature of such narratives. While, to a degree this ambiguity arises from the language of the text itself, Alpyağıl does not exclude the possibility that modern readers are experiencing ambiguity because they are simply unfamiliar with the Qur'an's poetics. In other words, it might have been that the early Qur'an audience knew full well how to navigate through the literary aspects of the Qur'an, while contemporary readers have lost this ability

³⁹⁸ Alpyağıl, 52.

³⁹⁹ Qur'an 53:14-15

⁴⁰⁰ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 53.

⁴⁰¹ Alpyağıl is referring to the well-known chapter in the Qur'an that contains the story of the Companions of the Cave (*aşhāb al-Kahf*).

through an inescapable, fundamental historical distance (*tarihsel mesafe*) to the text⁴⁰².

After having outlined his arguments in favour of an objectivist and subjectivist orientation in Qur'an hermeneutics, Alpyağıl concludes his own position in terms of what he refers to as a dialectical/synthetical account on the matter⁴⁰³, or in other words, a 'dualistic hermeneutics' (*ikili bir hermenötik*). Alpyağıl indicates that he wished to demonstrate a hermeneutics where the rules that constitute a text's meaning would be respected, while also appreciating the internal (*içsel*) dialogue between the subject and the Qur'an⁴⁰⁴. According to Alpyağıl, we have to acknowledge that an unregulated relationship to the text, will inevitably render the text indefensible against being overrun (*istila*) by subjective interpretations⁴⁰⁵. However, argues Alpyağıl, we must also acknowledge that all the rules and regulations set out in the tradition of Qur'an sciences (*Kur'an ilimleri*) must be bend on occasion⁴⁰⁶, since ambiguous elements of the Qur'an, such as otherworldly descriptions, demand a creativity in interpretation that goes beyond a static application of pre-defined rules.

In later essays, Alpyağıl further emphasizes that a subjective relationship with the text transcends method because of the latter's limits. By delving into the aesthetic and historical significance of the Qur'an, Alpyağıl accentuates the role of the subject in interpretation by arguing at various turns that the full meaning of the Qur'an can only be disclosed when the right subjective preconditions are in place. In other words, how the earlier mentioned dialogue between reader and text will fare, is dependent on how the reader relates himself or herself to the text and not so much on whether the right theoretical method of interpretation is adhered. Accordingly, faith and emotion play an important role in Alpyağıl's hermeneutics. Moreover,

⁴⁰² Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik?* : *Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 53.

⁴⁰³ Alpyağıl, 54.

⁴⁰⁴ Alpyağıl, 55.

⁴⁰⁵ Alpyağıl, 54.

⁴⁰⁶ Alpyağıl, 54.

since everyone is not prone to share the same belief or emotional sentiments towards the Qur'an, this also means that the Qur'an will not be accessible to everyone in the same objective way.

The Qur'an and art

The discussion concerning the transcendent relationship of the subject to the Qur'an, as well as the limits of method, is continued by Alpyağıl in reference to the aesthetic experience of the Qur'an. In *Heidegger'in Ontolojik Hermenötiği Bağlamında Kuramsal An- lamanın Tenkidi: Kur'an Bizim Ne'yimiz Oluyor* (The Critique of Analytical Understanding in Light of Heidegger's Ontological Hermeneutics: What Is the Qur'an for Us?), Alpyağıl challenges the hermeneutical presupposition that the Qur'an is a 'black box' waiting to be deciphered by the right theoretical instrument, such as hermeneutics, structuralism, or anthropology⁴⁰⁷. On the contrary, the Qur'an is not some passive object waiting to be decoded but is according to Alpyağıl like a piece of art (*sanat eseri*) guiding its own experience. In other words, when we engage in understanding the Qur'an: "the reader does not guide the text, but the reader is guided by the text."⁴⁰⁸

The fact that the aesthetic nature of the Qur'an guides its own experience, might suggest that the earlier mentioned interpretive instruments (*araçlar*) such as anthropology have no place in understanding the Qur'an. However, Alpyağıl reassures that this is not the point he is trying to make. Rather, he only wishes to emphasize that the aesthetic experience a believer has of the Qur'an is such a fundamental and profound experience, that it is not possible to explain its inner dimensions by a single theory (*kuram*) alone⁴⁰⁹. For, as we shall see in a subsequent section, Alpyağıl will argue that the communication realized in the aesthetic experience between a person and the reality spectated, is ineffable. As such, the full

⁴⁰⁷ Alpyağıl, 57.

⁴⁰⁸ Alpyağıl, 58.

⁴⁰⁹ Alpyağıl, 59.

reality of the communication and understanding that ensues from such an experience eludes methodic dissection.

It is important to note that the qualifications made by Alpyağıl, which refers to the Qur'an as art and its reading by a believer as an aesthetic experience, should only be treated in a metaphorical and heuristic sense. For starters, Alpyağıl makes it clear that he does not equate (*özdeş*) the Qur'an with art but wishes to discuss the Qur'an in the context of art, since he believes it is the best context wherewith the experience of reading the Qur'an by a believer can be best elucidated⁴¹⁰. Moreover, Alpyağıl only likens and does not identify the experience a believer has of the Qur'an to that of a spectator of art: "The essence of this experience [i.e. reading the Qur'an], most resembles a work of art (*sanat yapıtı*) and its spectator (*izleyici*)."⁴¹¹ In other words, by claiming that reading the Qur'an most resembles the experience of a work of art, Alpyağıl is explicitly enunciating that both experiences are similar but not the same.

After establishing the context of the ensuing discussion, Alpyağıl refers again to another Western philosopher, whose insights are used to form his own ideas. In this case, these ideas belong to Heidegger. By recounting some key insights from Heidegger on art and meaning, Alpyağıl will critically re-examine the classical subject-object dichotomy, and establish the fact that truth reveals itself not independently from either the subject or the object but in the intersubjective interaction of both. As a consequence, when related to the problem of understanding the Qur'an, we will discover that Alpyağıl will argue that the Qur'an's meaning can only be recovered by a reader who fulfils the right personal qualifications, such as having an awareness of his or her finitude. However, to fully understand the extent of this important hermeneutical presumption, it is necessary

⁴¹⁰ Alpyağıl, 59.

⁴¹¹ Alpyağıl, 58.

to discuss some of the earlier mentioned Heideggerian insights as recounted and interpreted by Alpyağıl.

Alpyağıl's discussion of Heidegger's insights, starts with Heidegger's question as to what a piece of art really represents. Accordingly, to recount this question of Heidegger:

"A painting by Van Gogh: a pair of sturdy peasant shoes, nothing else. The picture really represents nothing. Yet you are alone at once with what is there, as if you yourself were heading homeward from the field on a late autumn evening, tired, with your hoe, as the last potato fires smolder out. What is in being here? The canvas? The brushstrokes? The patches of color?"⁴¹²

According to Alpyağıl, the answer to Heidegger's question as to 'what is in being there?', is undeniably not the material elements of the painting, such as the paint or the canvas used. Rather, as Alpyağıl argues, the painting communicates a reality that is ineffable: "We remain silent, only the fact that we have experienced is certain. The image tells us many things, [and] between us a profound (*yoğun*) communication occurs that is not expressed or cannot be expressed in language."⁴¹³

To scrutinize the profound experience of art with a theoretical inquiry, is according to Alpyağıl, a cause for breaking the natural relationship (*doğal ilişkimiz*) we have with art⁴¹⁴. Alpyağıl argues that it is the nature of theory to dissect, however, by dissecting our experience of art, the holistic meaning received through this experience becomes disseminated (*bütünlüklü anlam saçılır*)⁴¹⁵, and thereby impossible to recollect afterwards (*toparlanamaz bir hale gelir*). Moreover, by theoretical investigating, for example, what the material of the shoes was made of

⁴¹² Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, Yale Nota Bene (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 37–38; Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 60.

⁴¹³ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 60.

⁴¹⁴ Alpyağıl, 61.

⁴¹⁵ Alpyağıl, 61.

in the earlier mentioned Van Gogh painting, we are diverting the deeper significance of the painting away towards a simple chemistry explanation ⁴¹⁶.

The importance of the unitary relationship between the subject and the object for the constitution of meaning is further emphasized by Alpyağıl in another important discussion of Heidegger. This discussion concerns Heidegger's concepts of 'present-to-hand' (*vorhanden*) and 'ready-to-hand' (*zuhanden*) as illustrated in the well-known example of a person's relationship to a tool, such as a hammer. According to Alpyağıl's reading, Heidegger argued that we come to know what a hammer is not by considering it as an object present-to-hand but as a tool that is ready-to-hand wherewith nails can be hammered⁴¹⁷. As Heidegger states:

"The less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is - as equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific 'manipulability' [*"Handlichkeit"*] of the hammer. The kind of Being which equipment possesses - in which it manifests itself in its own right- we call "*readiness- to-hand*" [*Zuhandenheit*]." ⁴¹⁸

On the other hand, argues Alpyağıl, by removing a hammer from our lifeworld, that is its context of use, the hammer becomes devoid of meaning, and turns into a simple wooden handle with a piece of metal attached to it⁴¹⁹.

Inspired by the earlier remarks from Heidegger, Alpyağıl commences into the argument that the Qur'an also receives its meaning in practice and from experience. First, to the extent that a hammer could ever be really understood in the event of hammering, the full meaning of rituals described in the Qur'an, such as prayer, fasting or ritual charity (*zekat*), are also according to Alpyağıl only understood in

⁴¹⁶ Alpyağıl, 61.

⁴¹⁷ Alpyağıl, 62.

⁴¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 98; Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 63.

⁴¹⁹ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler 1*, 62.

practice⁴²⁰. Second, Alpyağıl believes that the dialogue between the Qur'an and reader is defined by a relationship that is akin to the earlier expressed aesthetic experience of a Van Gogh painting. In other words, in the event of understanding the Qur'an, one also enters a communicative relationship without being able to express this communication in words. According to Alpyağıl, this deeper, more intuitive nature of experiencing the Qur'an has also been expressed by the Qur'an itself, as these verses attest:

"For, Believers are those who, when Allah is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear His signs rehearsed, find their faith strengthened, and put (all) their trust in their Lord;"⁴²¹

"And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth: they pray: "Our Lord! We believe; write us down among the witnesses."⁴²²

While the similarities between the experience of art and the Qur'an have been emphasized up to this point, it must be noted that Alpyağıl also sees a fundamental difference in both experiences. This difference primarily revolves around a set of preconditions necessary for understanding the Qur'an that are not directly pertinent to the understanding of art. The preconditions a reader of the Qur'an must meet, are enumerated by Alpyağıl as follows: adherence to a proper politics of recognition (*tanıma siyaseti*), have awareness of personal finitude (*fanilik bilinci*), harbour good will (*iyi istenç*) and exercise common sense (*sağ duyu*). Accordingly, whereas art might not be dependent for its understanding on whether someone harbours good will against it or whether someone is aware of their own finitude, the Qur'an, according to Alpyağıl, only discloses its full meaning to a reader that properly fulfils these conditions.

⁴²⁰ Alpyağıl, 66.

⁴²¹ Qur'an 8:2

⁴²² Qur'an 5:83

The first condition to understand the Qur'an, according to Alpyağıl, is to adhere to the right politics of recognition. This term is conventionally used in the context of international relations between nation states. Accordingly, argues Alpyağıl, if a nation were to declare their independence, as long as other nations would not recognize this independence, this declaration of independence would be meaningless to other nations⁴²³. In other words, the significance of something changes according to how it is recognized. Likewise, faith is also marked to a great degree (*büyük ölçüde*) by a politics of recognition⁴²⁴. While not entirely explained by Alpyağıl what faith exactly recognizes, it can only be assumed and surmised that Alpyağıl means that one recognizes the Qur'an to be from God. As such, the degree in which someone recognizes the Qur'an as a source of divine truth, will inevitably be of consequence for the what kind of meaning the Qur'an has to offer.

Besides the politics of recognition, or in indirect words faith, the degree as to which someone is aware of their own finitude will also direct the meaning of the Qur'an according to Alpyağıl. This awareness, which is called a knowledge of finitude (*fanilik bilinci*) by Alpyağıl, is described as follows: "The knowledge of finitude, is the awareness of humanity's limitations, that there cannot be an absolute subject (*mutlak özne*), and that they [i.e. humans] cannot encompass (*kuşatmayacağını*) all knowledge."⁴²⁵ As such, one must be aware of their own limitations, and thereby sustain an openness to learn from the other⁴²⁶. Without the willingness to listen to the other, one will never be able to understand as the following Qur'an verse states: "When Our Signs are rehearsed to such a one, he turns away in arrogance, as if he heard them not, as if there were deafness in both his ears"⁴²⁷.

Both abovementioned preconditions to reading the Qur'an, inevitably have an important bearing on the status of the relationship between the reader and the

⁴²³ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 69.

⁴²⁴ Alpyağıl, 69.

⁴²⁵ Alpyağıl, 71.

⁴²⁶ Alpyağıl, 71.

⁴²⁷ Qur'an: 31:7

Qur'an. While humans are flawed and finite, God and His message, on the other hand, are perfect and infinite⁴²⁸. Accordingly, the relationship between the Qur'an and its reader, cannot be realized in horizontal and equal terms, since the text has an authority over the subject by having its origins with God. As such, while interpretation is still a legitimate means to engage with the text, it must always respect the status of the text, and therefore, never try to force itself on the text⁴²⁹. On the contrary, a reader of God's revelation must let the text 'open itself' to the reader by standing in service of the text and by letting oneself be guided by what the text has to say⁴³⁰.

Good will is also deemed to be another important subjective precondition. According to Alpyağıl, the base condition for a healthy communication between author and audience is the will to understand each other (*anlama istenci*)⁴³¹. In other words, an author believes in the fact that he or she can be understood by his or her audience, and the reader tries his best to listen and understand the author⁴³². Accordingly, when the communication between reader and text lacks this good will, a breakdown in communication occurs, which inevitably perturbs the understanding of the text in question. The reception history of the Qur'an, which Alpyağıl references, illustrates this point further. As it is known, the Qur'an describes a variety of similes, referring to the likes of mosquitos and other symbols. However, the detractors of the Qur'an were questioning as to why God would refer to something as lowly as a mosquito in His message. The answer presented by the Qur'an to this problem is as follows: "Allah disdains not to use the similitude of things, lowest as well as highest. Those who believe know that it is truth from their Lord; but those who reject Faith say: "What means Allah by this similitude?"⁴³³ As this verse demonstrates, those who believed in the Qur'an did not experience any

⁴²⁸ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 71.

⁴²⁹ Alpyağıl uses in this context the notion of the "rape of the text", see: Alpyağıl, 72.

⁴³⁰ Alpyağıl, 72.

⁴³¹ Alpyağıl, 72.

⁴³² Alpyağıl, 73.

⁴³³ Qur'an: 2:26

problems in the understanding of the verses that contained similes; rather, it was the detractors of the Qur'an that wondered as to what God meant by a certain analogy. Another verse of the Qur'an, also referenced by Alpyağıl, might shed light on the cause of this misunderstanding: "And that those in whose hearts is a disease and the Unbelievers may say, "What symbol doth Allah intend by this?" In other words, as Alpyağıl concludes, believers understood the verses because of their intrinsic openness to understand the text, whereas the inability to understand the Qur'an by the detractors of the Qur'an was accounted for by their ill intent (*art niyet*) towards the Qur'an.

Finally, one must also exercise common sense in order to understand the Qur'an. While the importance of common sense is being noted on various occasions by Alpyağıl, it is only explained with one particular example. The example in question, whose extreme nature is also acknowledged by Alpyağıl⁴³⁴, pertains to the Qur'an's strong disapproval of slander: "O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it... But fear Allah: For Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful."⁴³⁵ Taking this verse into account, Alpyağıl argues that while his Turkish audience might find it abhorrent to eat the flesh of one's brother by virtue of their common-sense understanding, a cannibal could maintain a totally different perspective on the perspective. Accordingly, without a reference to common sense, the dreadful significance of slander, which the verse wishes to convey through its analogy to eating human flesh, would be lost, thereby shifting the meaning and understanding of the Qur'an.

By stipulating preconditions to the understanding of the Qur'an, Alpyağıl is limiting the possibility for the message of the Qur'an to be universally accessible or

⁴³⁴ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 75.

⁴³⁵ Qur'an 49:12

understood. Alpyağıl, who is fully aware of this, argues that the Qur'an itself has already accepted the fact that it cannot be understood by everyone: "And We put coverings over their hearts (and minds) lest they should understand the Qur'an, and deafness into their ears: when thou dost commemorate thy Lord and Him alone in the Qur'an, they turn on their backs, fleeing (from the Truth)."⁴³⁶ As such, we must admit that the Qur'an itself points towards the fact that some people are wilfully removed by God from understanding the Qur'an.

As with his previous essays, Alpyağıl brings the current essay to an end with some final reflections. These final reflections revolve around two questions Alpyağıl imagines a hypothetical, critical reader would have asked in response to all his previous claims concerning the understanding of the Qur'an. The first question inquires as to whether Alpyağıl's elevation of the aesthetic experience of the Qur'an did not move too strongly from an optimistic assumption (*iyimser varsayım*) that the audience of the text and the text would not be subjected to any problems during the process of understanding?⁴³⁷ While Alpyağıl does not explain explicitly how such a question could come about, it can be theorized that it comes from the fact that Alpyağıl has as of yet only spoken positively of the aesthetic experience, and neglected to explore also its potential issues. The second question, on the other hand, asks whether Alpyağıl is not introducing meaning subjectivism (*anlam subjektivizm*) to Qur'an hermeneutics. This second question, however, can be straightforwardly deduced from Alpyağıl's continuous accentuation of subjectivity in understanding.

Rather than rebuking this potential criticism, Alpyağıl chooses to acknowledge it. Indeed, argues Alpyağıl, the history of Qur'an interpretation demonstrates that the meaning of the Qur'an might not be as self-evident and directly intuited as his earlier analogy between reading the Qur'an and the aesthetic experience might

⁴³⁶ Qur'an 17:46. See also Qur'an 6:25

⁴³⁷ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 76.

suggest. Moreover, it cannot be denied that even with good will, one can potentially fail to understand the Qur'an⁴³⁸. Accordingly, in such cases where understanding becomes problematic, interpretation by recourse to objective methods becomes indispensable (*vazgeçilmez*)⁴³⁹.

Alpyağıl also admits that his ideas introduce a degree of subjectivism to Qur'an hermeneutics: "For this author, there is no meaning in an [absolute] subject independent of the text, or an [absolute] text independent of the subject."⁴⁴⁰ However, this does not mean that the subject can read any kind of meaning that they desire into the Qur'an⁴⁴¹, since in the aesthetic experience the object directs the subject, rather than the other way around. Moreover, it would also be contrary to the earlier mentioned principle of being aware of one's limitations⁴⁴², which always desires to service the text, rather than to overrule it.

Given the prior remarks, it should become clear that the subject-object dialectic in Alpyağıl's thought is fundamentally grounded in a mutually interdependent relationship. In the dialogue between the Qur'an and the reader, both the subject's private pre-understanding and the use of objective theoretical methodologies are given a right to exist by Alpyağıl. In this sense, as Alpyağıl admits, his theory differs from objectivist theories on account of their fundamental neglect of the subject's undeniable role in the constitution of meaning. Conversely, his respect of objective rules, simultaneously demonstrates how his theory veers away from a hypersubjectivist position. However, if we are to measure subjectivity against objectivity, it would be according to Alpyağıl in terms of precedence, and not in terms of the one cancelling the other's right to exist. For, as Alpyağıl clarifies, without people believing in a text, there is no value to having all these complicated instruments wherewith the text can be interpreted. In other words, "The essence of

⁴³⁸ Alpyağıl, 77.

⁴³⁹ Alpyağıl, 76.

⁴⁴⁰ Alpyağıl, 77.

⁴⁴¹ Alpyağıl, 77.

⁴⁴² Alpyağıl, 77.

what we are trying to say is as follows: instruments are only meaningful when the people exist that are able to use them.”⁴⁴³

Seeing-as

The aesthetic experience of the Qur’an is also explored in a second instance by Alpyağıl. However, this time in reference to the ideas of Wittgenstein. In the essay *Farklı Görme, “...Olarak Görme”* (Seeing Differently, Seeing-as), Alpyağıl explores the problem of why the same phenomena can be ‘seen’ differently by diverse parties. Alpyağıl inquires why it is that some people see rain to be merely a natural occurrence (*doğal hadise*), while others see it as an act of God’s mercy?⁴⁴⁴

Moreover, to what extent does interpretation play a role, if at all, in such divergent perceptions of the same phenomena? In order to answer these questions, and to understand the Qur’an hermeneutical consequences of these answers, Alpyağıl returns once more to the remarks written by the later Wittgenstein, or as Alpyağıl puts it: “The perspective maintained in discussing this topic, will be fundamentally Wittgensteinian.”⁴⁴⁵

As was the case in the first essay, Alpyağıl first lays the groundwork of his own argument by recounting some of the later Wittgenstein’s philosophical inquiries, beginning with Wittgenstein’s distinction between the various uses of ‘seeing’. Accordingly, we discover that Wittgenstein describes the two uses of seeing as follows: “Two uses of the word “see”. The one: “What do you see there?” - “I see *this*” (and then a description, a drawing, a copy). The other: “I see a likeness in these two faces” - let the man to whom I tell this be seeing the faces as clearly as I do myself.”⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴³ Alpyağıl, 79.

⁴⁴⁴ Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 18.

⁴⁴⁵ Alpyağıl, 18.

⁴⁴⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, xi; Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 19.

Alpyağıl states that whereas the first manner of seeing, such as seeing a simple rock, is one of sensory perception, the second seeing, such as noting the likeness between two faces, goes beyond sensory perception (*algı*)⁴⁴⁷. The latter, which Alpyağıl subsequently refers to as seeing-as ("*olarak görme*"), is according to Wittgenstein evident when we suddenly perceive something in a different manner, because of another aspect of the phenomenon dawning on us: "I observe a face, and then suddenly notice its likeness to another. I see that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience "noticing an aspect"⁴⁴⁸.

Wittgenstein gives in this regard the well-known example of Jastrow's duck-rabbit:

"I'm shown a picture-rabbit and asked what it is; I say "It's a rabbit". Not "Now it's a rabbit". I'm reporting my perception. a I'm shown the duck-rabbit and asked what it is; I *may* say "It's a duck- rabbit". But I may also react to the question quite differently. - The answer that it is a duck-rabbit is again the report of a perception; the answer "Now it's a rabbit" is not. Had I replied "It's a rabbit", the ambiguity would have escaped me, and I would have been reporting my perception."⁴⁴⁹

In other words, by claiming that something is 'now' - in all suddenness - a rabbit, we are presenting a report about an experience that is more than a mere visual experience⁴⁵⁰; for, as it can be surmised, if it were to be a mere visual experience, the object would have had to remain static in experience and not change as it did.

The fact that seeing-as is more than a visual experience, is further expanded upon by Wittgenstein with another example concerning our observation of a rabbit.

When we plainly see a rabbit, we can be inquired as to what we see, and report back: "a rabbit". However, when we look at a landscape and suddenly see a rabbit

⁴⁴⁷ Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 19.

⁴⁴⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 205e; Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 20.

⁴⁴⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, xi; Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 19.

⁴⁵⁰ Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 20.

running past us, we would exclaim “a rabbit!”. Nevertheless, as Wittgenstein argues:

“Both things, both the report and the exclamation, are expressions of perception and of visual experience. But the exclamation is so in a different sense from the report: it is forced from us. - It stands to the experience somewhat as a cry to pain. But since the exclamation is the description of a perception, one can also call it the expression of thought. - Someone who looks at an object need not think of it; but whoever has the visual experience expressed by the exclamation is also *thinking* of what he sees.”⁴⁵¹

Concordantly, as Wittgenstein concludes, the ‘lighting up of an aspect’ seems to be both a ‘half visual experience’, as well as a ‘half thought’.

Seeing-as is defined by other variables besides visual experience alone. The first set of variables discussed by Alpyağıl are education and the mastery of technique. According to Alpyağıl, one needs only to consider traffic signs. The meaning of such signs is dependent upon convention. As such, our reaction (*reaksiyonumuz*) to these signs is determined by our familiarity and education of these signs⁴⁵². Those who are unfamiliar with these signs will inevitably have a totally different reaction. To clarify, while we might see traffic signs as a regulating device and organize our actions around its conventional significance, someone who has not learned traffic rules, or does not know what a traffic sign is for that matter, might *see it as a something differently*, and accordingly, react in a wholly different manner. Likewise, argues Alpyağıl, mastery of technique (*bir teknikte usta olma*), also plays an important role in the subject’s experience of seeing-as. This matter has been described as follows by Wittgenstein:

“In the triangle I can see now *this* as apex, *that* as base - now *this* as apex, *that* as base. — Clearly the words “Now I am seeing *this* as the apex” cannot so far have any significance for a learner who has only just met the concepts of apex, base, and

⁴⁵¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 207e; Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 22.

⁴⁵² Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 20.

so on. But I do not mean this as an empirical proposition. Only of someone *capable* of making certain applications of the figure with facility would one say that he saw it now *this* way, now *that* way. The substratum of this experience is the mastery of a technique."⁴⁵³

Besides education and the mastery of technique, Alpyağıl also credits volition (*irade*) with an important role in defining the experience of seeing-as. According to Alpyağıl, this fact implies that a person can be asked to see things differently. Without doubt, it is not possible to command someone to see a blue object when that person experiences the object as red⁴⁵⁴. However, according to Alpyağıl, it is possible to ask someone to see a form differently (*şimdi bu şekli böyle gör*). While Alpyağıl does not present a concrete example, we can theorize that Alpyağıl is referring to such phenomena as when one is asked to see their seemingly bad predicament as a blessing in disguise. Accordingly, a person who is told to see his or her predicament in another manner, can choose to fulfil such a request or reject it.

After establishing these base reflections concerning the experience of seeing-as, Alpyağıl advances further into describing the relationship between the concept of seeing-as and the philosophy of religion, and by extension, its relationship to what Alpyağıl calls religious hermeneutics (*dinsel hermenötik*). According to Alpyağıl, religious beliefs are a form of seeing-as. As such, in Alpyağıl's experience, which he shall shortly further elaborate, there is no fundamental difference between the earlier discussed examples from Wittgenstein, such as seeing a face as similar to another face or coming to see something as a duck that hitherto been pictured as a rabbit, and seeing an event as a miracle or a text as God's revelation⁴⁵⁵. Moreover, Alpyağıl also deems the earlier discussed expressions, such as "I see a rabbit!", and its religious counterpart: "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!", as being similar expressions of seeing-as.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 219e.

⁴⁵⁴ Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 23.

⁴⁵⁵ Alpyağıl, 24.

⁴⁵⁶ Alpyağıl, 24.

Alpyağıl sheds further light on these claims, by briefly discussing the concept of seeing-as in reference to familiar problems within the philosophy of religion, commencing with the arguments for the existence of God. Alpyağıl notes that these arguments, such as the cosmological argument or the argument from design, are inevitably not without their weak points, nor are they closed to any further criticism⁴⁵⁷. As such, these arguments cannot compel someone to believe⁴⁵⁸. They are only meaningful to those who are already capable of seeing the thing which is argued for⁴⁵⁹. In other words, as Alpyağıl makes it clear, the argument from design is only meaningful to those who are capable of seeing the universe as a design from God. According to Alpyağıl, religious experience, another topic of the philosophy of religion, is also defined by a private experience of seeing. For example, argues Alpyağıl, we cannot see something as beautiful on account of another's experience. Rather, we must see the thing as beautiful for ourselves⁴⁶⁰. Likewise, it is not possible to believe in God on account of another person's experience, but one must believe for themselves⁴⁶¹.

To present a final example, Alpyağıl argues that religious conversions also relate to the concept of seeing-as, because it could be argued, as Alpyağıl does, that an aspect of something can dawn on a person, and thereby make them see things differently. Accordingly, someone who saw the universe as a product of blind evolution, could suddenly see it is as creation of God⁴⁶². To Alpyağıl's mind comes the experience of Job, who came to lose a lot in life such as his children. However, rather than seeing his tragic loss in naturalistic terms, Job called out the following: "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁷ Alpyağıl, 24.

⁴⁵⁸ Alpyağıl, 24.

⁴⁵⁹ Alpyağıl, 24–25.

⁴⁶⁰ Alpyağıl, 27–28.

⁴⁶¹ Alpyağıl, 28.

⁴⁶² Alpyağıl, 28.

⁴⁶³ Alpyağıl, 29.

It should be clear by now that for Alpyağıl there is an undeniable relationship between the concept of seeing-as and certain religious experiences. However, it is still not clear what the relationship of seeing-as is to the problem of interpretation. Given the prior discussions, we might be inclined to identify the phenomenon of interpretation with the experience of seeing-as. Religious worldviews are for that matter often said to be different interpretations of the world. However, according to Alpyağıl, while there is a relationship, there are also marked distinctions between the experience of seeing-as and the act of interpreting. First and foremost, argues Alpyağıl, interpretation is an activity, something we do, while seeing is an experience⁴⁶⁴. Secondly, the act of seeing is not something that can be validated, whereas an interpretation can⁴⁶⁵. Lastly, interpretations have a coercive nature to them. An interpretation can argue that something must actually be understood as something else. On the other hand, the experience of seeing-as is not at all forced, nor the outcome of any logical deliberation or overweighing of evidence⁴⁶⁶.

The direct experience of seeing-as in juxtaposition to interpretation, is further advanced by Alpyağıl by drawing a parallel with language. Accordingly, argues Alpyağıl, the difference in experience between seeing-as and interpretation is similar to the difference between our experience of our mother tongue and a foreign tongue⁴⁶⁷. To elaborate, when we converse or read in our native tongue, we do not interpret the words used. However, when we are engaging with a foreign language, we are often thinking about the words used, interpreting these words, and if necessary, searching for their meaning in a dictionary⁴⁶⁸. As such, Alpyağıl concludes, interpretation is an incidental recourse, only taken when something is foreign to our natural and intuitive experience⁴⁶⁹.

⁴⁶⁴ Alpyağıl, 31.

⁴⁶⁵ Alpyağıl, 31.

⁴⁶⁶ Alpyağıl, 31.

⁴⁶⁷ Alpyağıl, 32.

⁴⁶⁸ Alpyağıl, 32.

⁴⁶⁹ Alpyağıl, 32.

In continuation with the aforementioned argument, Alpyağıl considers seeing-as as the most primary relationship a believer has with the text, far more fundamental than interpretation, which is seen by him as an incidental recourse. For example, what defines the relationship of a believer to the text is the fact that a believer sees God in scripture⁴⁷⁰. This experience is the base, fundamental experience of the text, and is not reliant on nor occasioned by logical inference (*çıkarım*), interpretation (*yorum*) or dogma⁴⁷¹. This, however, does not mean according to Alpyağıl that the text cannot or should not at all be interpreted, only that there are certain elements in the Qur'an that cannot be interpreted because their meaning derives from a more direct experience of seeing-as⁴⁷².

One such element that relies on the direct experience of seeing-as, rather than interpretation, are the miracles described in the Qur'an. According to Alpyağıl, believers see miracles as a direct revelation (*tezahür*) of God's will, without resorting to logical inferences (*mantıksal çıkarım*) or interpretations⁴⁷³. For a believer, to witness (*tanık*) or be told of miracles, is not an experience guided by interpretation. For example, argues Alpyağıl, a believer that experiences the event of Moses splitting the Red Sea, does not come to the conclusion that it was an event from God after needing to deliberate and interpret. Rather, as Alpyağıl argues, a believer sees the event directly (*aniden*) as a revelation of God's will⁴⁷⁴.

Following these comments on miracles and seeing-as, Alpyağıl concludes his essay with the question as to what the status of someone is who cannot see something as something else (*olarak görememek*). For example, a person who, in contrast to the abovementioned believer, cannot see a miracle in an event. In other words, as Alpyağıl further sharpens his question, what is the determining factor for aspect

⁴⁷⁰ Alpyağıl, 33.

⁴⁷¹ Alpyağıl, 33.

⁴⁷² Alpyağıl, 38.

⁴⁷³ Alpyağıl, 33.

⁴⁷⁴ Alpyağıl, 34.

blindness (*görünüş körlüğü*)?⁴⁷⁵ Recounting Wittgenstein, Alpyağıl argues that the notion of seeing-as is intimately tied to the concept of imagination: “The concept of an aspect is related to the concept of imagination. In other words, the concept ‘Now I see it as . . .’ is related to ‘Now I am imagining *that*’.”⁴⁷⁶ Accordingly, as Alpyağıl concludes, the ability to see more than what is ordinary (*sıradan*) or mundane (*olağan*), as believers do with miracles, has to do with the degree to which a person is able to apply his or her imagination⁴⁷⁷. For Alpyağıl, persons who lack in imagination, will inevitably become prisoners (*tutsak*) of one mode of appearance (*görünüş*)⁴⁷⁸, and therefore, as implied, become blind towards other aspects.

Aspect-blindness is an impediment that does not only pertain to visual experiences but can also, according to Alpyağıl, pertain to meaning. In other words, one can also be afflicted by meaning-blindness (*anlam körlüğü*)⁴⁷⁹. The relationship between meaning-blindness and the hitherto discussed concept of seeing-as, is substantiated by Alpyağıl with a few remarks from Wittgenstein. The first remark by Wittgenstein establishes the fact that there is an intimate connection between the experience of words and seeing-as: “The importance of this concept [i.e. aspect-blindness] lies in the connection between the concepts of seeing an aspect and of experiencing the meaning of a word.”⁴⁸⁰ Accordingly, someone who is not capable of, for example, seeing a sign as an arrow, is simultaneously not capable of understanding the words “to see the sign as an arrow”. In such an instance, as Alpyağıl recounts Wittgenstein, we must consider the aforementioned person to be meaning-blind: “Anyone who

⁴⁷⁵ Alpyağıl, 35.

⁴⁷⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 224e; Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 35.

⁴⁷⁷ Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 36.

⁴⁷⁸ Alpyağıl, 35.

⁴⁷⁹ Alpyağıl, 36.

⁴⁸⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 225e; Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur’an’i anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 35.

cannot understand and learn to use the words “to see the sign as an arrow”—that's whom I call “meaning-blind.”⁴⁸¹

Imagination also plays an important role in the experience of meaning, as Alpyağıl faults a lack of imagination for causing the earlier mentioned meaning-blindness.

⁴⁸². Alpyağıl relates in this regard the following citation by Ricoeur: “Imagining is first and foremost restructuring semantic fields. It is, to use Wittgenstein's expression in the *Philosophical Investigations*, “seeing as”⁴⁸³ While this citation makes it clear that Alpyağıl supports Ricoeur's claim, the reader unfamiliar with Ricoeur's work is left to wonder what the exact significance of imagination is in its ability to “restructure semantic fields”, since it is a question left unanswered by Alpyağıl. Nevertheless, taking the grander context of this citation in consideration, we are told by Ricoeur that it is imagination which allows for a person to see a relationship, as in the case of a metaphor, between two objects that would otherwise be considered to be logically distant from each other:

“Resemblance is itself a function of the use of unusual predicates. It consists in the rapprochement in which the logical distance between far-flung semantic fields suddenly falls away, creating a semantic shock which, in turn, sparks the meaning of the metaphor. Imagination is the apperception, the sudden view, of a new predicative pertinence.”⁴⁸⁴

In other words, as the example of metaphors illustrates, by utilizing his or her imagination, a person is able to see why a seemingly illogical predication, could still be sensible. Inversely, a person lacking in imagination will neither be able to forge

⁴⁸¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, G.H. von Wright, and H. Nyman, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), para. 344; Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, para. 36.

⁴⁸² Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 36.

⁴⁸³ Paul Ricoeur, “Imagination in Discourse and in Action,” in *The Human Being in Action: The Irreducible Element in Man Part II Investigations at the Intersection of Philosophy and Psychiatry*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1978), 7; Alpyağıl, *Fark ve yorum : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler II*, 36.

⁴⁸⁴ Ricoeur, “Imagination in Discourse and in Action,” 7.

nor understand the meaning of a metaphor; evidencing thereby the connection made by Alpyağıl between imagination and meaning-blindness.

Faith and history

The subject-object dialectic also plays an important role in the problem of Qur'an historicism. Accordingly, the final essay of Alpyağıl that will be discussed is *Kimin Tarihi, Hangi Hermenötik? Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Tartışmalarına Elestirel Bir Katı* (Whose History, Which Hermeneutics? A Critical Contribution to the Debates Concerning the Qur'an and Historicism). As the title suggests, this essay focuses primarily on a critical evaluation of the problem of Qur'an historicism. The latter's legitimacy has undoubtedly been an important topic of contemporary discussions on Qur'an hermeneutics within Turkey. Mainly due to its controversial nature and advocacy by the illustrious Ankara School discussed in the introduction chapter. While a discussion of the problem of Qur'an historicism might at first instance suggest little direct relevance to the problem of subjectivity-objectivity in Qur'an hermeneutics, Alpyağıl's critique of Qur'an historicism bears at certain junctions an important intersection with the problem of subjectivity vis-à-vis objectivity in interpretation. This intersection can be attributed to the fact that a central problem of Qur'an historicism is to answer the question as to how a present-day subject could understand a historical object as the Qur'an. As such, to enlarge our understanding of Alpyağıl's ideas concerning the status of subjectivity in understanding the Qur'an, it is important to expand upon Alpyağıl's perspective on Qur'an historicism.

According to Alpyağıl, before any healthy understanding of Qur'an historicism can be offered, some general observations concerning the relationship between interpretations (*yorumlama faaliyeti*) and power (*iktidar*) have to be offered⁴⁸⁵.

⁴⁸⁵ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 136.

Every interpretation is bound to a political context (*siyasal baglam*)⁴⁸⁶. Accordingly, by admitting that interpretations are not free from political contexts, we can understand that historicism can also not operate without itself being influenced by its own political context. Hence, if we wish to fully understand historicism, we must understand it in light of its political context.

A keen awareness of this connection between power and historicism becomes especially critical in regard to the problem of *maşlahā* and *maqāṣid*. As Alpyağıl recounts, historicist discourse proposes that we not consider the literal (*zāhir*) interpretation of verses but the higher intents (*maqāṣid*) behind verses and their goal towards prosperity (*maşlahā*)⁴⁸⁷. However, we must not overlook according to Alpyağıl that both of these notions are a product of a ‘politics of interpretation’ (*yorum siyaseti*)⁴⁸⁸. In other words, as we can surmise, these notions receive their meaning according to the political context in which they are understood. For example, argues Alpyağıl, “Turkey’s prosperity [*maşlahā*] in the Middle East is not the same of that of the United States, because the powers are not the same.”⁴⁸⁹

Alpyağıl’s critique lays bare an important oversight in some theories of historicism, which is the inability to acknowledge that our understanding of the Qur’an’s objective intents is in fact relative to the socio-political context in which we live and therefore, subjective. For example, as Alpyağıl recalls, Fazlur Rahman had argued that in respect to the Qur’an “the *ratio legis* is the essence of the matter, the actual legislation being its embodiment so long as it faithfully and correctly realizes the *ratio*; if it does not, the law has to be changed.”⁴⁹⁰ There is no doubt, as the overall work of Rahman further attests, that Rahman sees the ratio as a transhistorical, objective fact, while legal rulings are seen as transient. However, if we are to

⁴⁸⁶ Alpyağıl, 143.

⁴⁸⁷ Alpyağıl, 147.

⁴⁸⁸ Alpyağıl, 147.

⁴⁸⁹ Alpyağıl, 147.

⁴⁹⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 48.

subscribe to Alpyağıl's hermeneutical tenets that interpretation cannot be separated from power relations, we have to acknowledge that both the *ratio legis* and the *ratio*, or with similar notions, the *maqāṣid* and the *maṣlaḥa*, are not transhistorical, objective facts undergirding the law of the Qur'an. On the contrary, as Alpyağıl stated, the significance of the *maqāṣid* and *maṣlaḥa* changes in accordance with the socio-political context.

Since Alpyağıl's method relies more on heuristics, rather than on an explicit catering of examples, there is some conjecture involved in what could be possible cases of Qur'an interpretation that demonstrate Alpyağıl's point concerning the subjectivity involved in the *maqāṣid* and *maṣlaḥa*. Nevertheless, if we are to continue the discussion from the works of Rahman, we can find an interpretation that can be easily deconstructed in light of Alpyağıl's 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. To recall, Rahman argued that verse 4:3 permitted polygamy because of historical necessity, since it was "not possible to remove polygamy legally at one stroke."⁴⁹¹ However, while the verse did permit the marriage of multiple women, the same verse also argued that "if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them) [i.e. your wives], then [marry] only one". Thus, as Rahman concludes, while polygamy was permitted because of contingent legal reasons, the sanctions put on its practice were "in the nature of a moral ideal towards which the society was expected to move."⁴⁹² Concordantly, we can gather from Rahman's statements that the Qur'an has two-levels of significance: contingent and ideal. While the permission on polygamy exhibits the Qur'an's contingent significance, the sanctions put on polygamy express the Qur'an's ideal for a society that is monogamous. However, as we return to Alpyağıl's hermeneutics, we could question whether it is indeed some objective moral ideal that is at work in the Qur'an or actually Rahman's subjective projections on the text. As Alpyağıl states elsewhere, Rahman inherited a world in which the Islamic world had lost all endurance and became dominated⁴⁹³. There is

⁴⁹¹ Rahman, 48.

⁴⁹² Rahman, 48.

⁴⁹³ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 145.

no doubt that polygamy is a practice eschewed in most of the modern western world. For Alpyağıl, even with the best of intentions, interpreters could still fall prey to their context: “A good intention is not enough by itself. For, there could always be ill-intended political powers that direct this good intention.”⁴⁹⁴ Accordingly, it would not be too difficult to question whether Rahman’s characterization of polygamy as contingent and monogamy as an objective moral ideal is not in reality a guised apologetic attempt to weaken the status of polygamy in Islam and elevate the status of monogamy instead.

For Alpyağıl there is no doubt that historicist readings of the Qur’an harbour a progression bias. In other words, historicists assume that the text was revealed in a distant, less ethically progressed past⁴⁹⁵. As such, Alpyağıl likens the historicist attitude towards that of the positivist anthropologist. According to Alpyağıl, the positivist anthropologist always approaches a foreign culture from the perspective that their own culture is better (*daha doğru*) than the culture studied⁴⁹⁶. Similarly, as Alpyağıl reverts the discussion to the understanding of the Qur’an, historicists advance a like position by confronting the text as the historical Other (*başkası gibi*) and judging it according to the perceived more elevated standards of the present⁴⁹⁷.

Such an approach to interpretation leads to two different consequences. First, as Alpyağıl argues, there is an inevitable alienation occurring (*yabancılaşmak*) between the Qur’an and the reader⁴⁹⁸. The Qur’an is always the historical Other that stands at a distance from the modern reader. Second, by always measuring the Qur’an according to the relative standards of our subjective present, we lose the ability to be judicious and pragmatic in regard to the application of the Qur’an within different contexts.

⁴⁹⁴ Alpyağıl, 143.

⁴⁹⁵ Alpyağıl, 153.

⁴⁹⁶ Alpyağıl, 151.

⁴⁹⁷ Alpyağıl, 152.

⁴⁹⁸ Alpyağıl, 153.

Alpyağıl clarifies the latter point by arguing that historicism has a flawed understanding of time (*zaman tasavvuru*)⁴⁹⁹. Alpyağıl's text seems to be referring to the earlier mentioned progression bias inherent in Turkish historicist discourse. In other words, historicists appreciate the Qur'an in reference to a perceived history of progress in which they find themselves. However, what they forget to understand, is that synchronously speaking the Qur'an can be read by different communities with different histories. As such, "It would not be a right approach, to argue that the understanding of a Muslim in North America should be absolutized and be put against an understanding developed in South Africa. If we are to expand upon this, while raising warhorses [as the Qur'an has argued] is not something incumbent upon American Muslims, the same could not be said in respect to someone from Afghanistan."⁵⁰⁰

For Alpyağıl, the Qur'an never meant to address or resolve all possible issues that humans would face over the course of history⁵⁰¹. Accordingly, when we return to verse 8:60 wherein the Qur'an proposes that believers ready "steeds of war", it is not done so by the Qur'an in order to suggest that war can be only prepared in one way. In the words of Alpyağıl, "a horse was even for those times one of the possible examples that could have been mentioned (besides such items as swords, camels, or catapults)."⁵⁰² Rather, the Qur'an is a book that indicates between the lines (*söz arasında*) that it is merely presenting a possible example of how to resolve an issue (*örneğin diyen bir kitaptır*)⁵⁰³. It is up to believers to further expand upon the model of the Qur'an and find suited solutions to certain problems⁵⁰⁴. As such, to extrapolate Alpyağıl's claims, if in 7th century Arabia the best preparation for war was by means of readying horses, Western Muslims in the present ought to follow

⁴⁹⁹ Alpyağıl, 156.

⁵⁰⁰ Alpyağıl, 156–57.

⁵⁰¹ Alpyağıl, 157.

⁵⁰² Alpyağıl, 158.

⁵⁰³ Alpyağıl, 158.

⁵⁰⁴ Alpyağıl, 158.

this model and prepare for current wars with the best resources of our times (e.g. a tank).

While some verses can be actualized in new contexts, other verses seem less suitable to be assimilated with the circumstances of the present. Alpyağıl recounts in this regard verses that pertain specifically to the Prophet's relationship with his spouses: "It is not lawful for thee (to marry more) women after this, nor to change them for (other) wives, even though their beauty attract thee"⁵⁰⁵. It is very difficult to infer from such verses an example or model to be followed, since the verse is very much particular to the Prophet and his own personal experiences. However, does this mean we should merely regard such verses as objective historical facts, or is there a possibility to even draw significance from such verses in our seemingly unrelated experiences?

For Alpyağıl there are two potential answers to this question. First, we could still appreciate seemingly historical verses as an inspiration for different modes of thinking (*alternatif düşünce biçimi*)⁵⁰⁶. For example, while the Qur'an's corporal punishments might not fit present circumstances, it is possible that the future might bring a different perspective on the applicability of corporal punishments, and thereby reintroduce it as one of God's penalties (*hudud*)⁵⁰⁷. What is important for Alpyağıl is not whether we should apply corporal punishment or not, but that we should not become incapable of seeing a world wherein it does make sense to apply corporal punishments. This, in contrast to Qur'an historicism's neurotic tendency to fear any regression into the past (*geçmişe duşmeme nevrozu içinde olmak*)⁵⁰⁸. Second, even if certain verses cannot become actualized again, they still have important bearings for the Islamic cultural consciousness. As Alpyağıl states, "The Qur'an that recounts the 7th century, is not [a source of] historical [facts], but a

⁵⁰⁵ Qur'an 33:52

⁵⁰⁶ Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 164.

⁵⁰⁷ Alpyağıl, 165.

⁵⁰⁸ Alpyağıl, 165.

totality of events (*olaylar bütünü*) that gives us identity and defines our [collective] memory (*bellek*).”⁵⁰⁹ Thus, if we are to return to the example of the Prophet and his wives, we could argue that such a verse has no practical relevance for modern Muslims. Nevertheless, it is a record of the Prophet’s experience, and hence, meaningful for the historical, cultural consciousness of Muslims.

Closing remarks

Unlike Cündioğlu’s solemn dedication to an objective understanding of the Qur’an discussed in the previous chapter, Alpyağıl has exhibited throughout his works a concurrent dedication to both a subjective and objective understanding of the Qur’an. Similar to Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl respects the linguistic horizon in which the message of the Qur’an was revealed. Language, as both Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu have argued, cannot function without being intrinsically intersubjective. Moreover, to be intersubjective, language has to involve subject independent rules. However, while Alpyağıl defends and advocates a reverence to the rules of a language, Alpyağıl does not believe that all of the Qur’an’s meanings can be resolved by sheer rule-following, i.e. method, alone. For, as Alpyağıl has argued, our relationship to the Qur’an is not one sided. The Qur’an also has power over us. First of all, the Qur’an’s ambiguity eludes our ability to fixate its meaning objectively and persistently. Second, the Qur’an also demands from us the right subjective preconditions such as faith in order to receive its message fully.

What has been unexpected in the previous discussions, given the open confessional and sometimes conservative⁵¹⁰ stance of Alpyağıl, is the fact that Alpyağıl’s dualistic hermeneutics lacks significant references to classical Islamic thought. In other words, the references to traditions such as *tafsīr* are made very sparingly. As a consequence, it is not clear from Alpyağıl’s own discussions how much of his ideas

⁵⁰⁹ Alpyağıl, 169.

⁵¹⁰ Such as Alpyağıl’s open attitude towards corporal punishments in Islamic jurisprudence.

are borrowed from the hermeneutical traditions of *tafsīr* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, nor what the status of these theories are in Alpyağıl's thinking. The most noteworthy reference to *tafsīr*, is Alpyağıl's statement that the rules and regulations set out in the tradition of Qur'an sciences, must be bend on occasion; since, as previously discussed, certain ambiguous elements of the Qur'an, such as its historical narratives, demand a creative understanding that goes beyond a static application of rules.

The fact that Alpyağıl solves familiar Qur'an hermeneutical problems without much reference to tradition, demonstrates the distinct, and thereby, novel nature of Alpyağıl's hermeneutical narrative. However, given the fact that Alpyağıl also does not present a significant explicit or implicit critique of tradition, so that it might be characterized as reformist or revisionist, it becomes very difficult to locate Alpyağıl's work in relation to other hermeneutical theories by contemporary Muslim thinkers that are deemed to be reformist or traditionalist.

The difficulty of situating Alpyağıl's works, becomes even more evident if we compare his works to those written by his Turkish colleagues, such as Ali Bulaç and Ömer Özsoy. In the essay *Hermeneutics as a Means to Read the Qur'an*, Bulaç questions the recent Turkish turn to hermeneutics as a framework wherewith the Qur'an should be understood. He insinuates that hermeneutics is not compatible with the fundamental Islamic outlook⁵¹¹, and argues that we ought to first exhaust our traditional frameworks (*elimizdeki usuller*) before we venture to adopt other methods (*yöntem*) such as hermeneutics⁵¹². Accordingly, Bulaç's work exemplifies a clear view of a conservatist attitude towards hermeneutics. However, if we recall Alpyağıl's work, we discover no such reservations towards hermeneutics, since Alpyağıl explicitly describes his work as an experiment in hermeneutics and

⁵¹¹ In hermeneutics, as exemplified by the works of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, an important aspiration is to understand the author better than he understood himself. However, given the Muslim belief that God is the author of the Qur'an, it would imply that we could understand something better than God Himself. Bulaç, "Kur'an'ı Okuma Biçimi Olarak Hermenötik," 117.

⁵¹² Bulaç, 118.

constructively engages with non-Islamic philosophies and ideas stemming from Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Similarly, in the works of Özsoy, and for that matter other Ankara School theologians, we can discover an explicit critique of traditional conceptions (*tasavvurlar*) and a proposal to revise our traditional understanding⁵¹³. However, in none of the previously studied works of Alpyağıl do we even discover a hint of a critique of tradition, let alone any propositions to revise it. As such, the challenge and need arises to extend, or perhaps revise, the conventional typology wherewith Muslim intellectual discourse is typified into such binary distinction as traditionalist-modernist or conservative-revisionist, since Alpyağıl's work demonstrates the existence of a narrative that is neither a simple reform or revision of tradition, nor a sheer apologetics of the latter.

Regardless of how we classify Alpyağıl's thought, one important contribution made by Alpyağıl to the overall discipline of Qur'an hermeneutics, is by providing a framework in which interpretation can be separated from understanding. In other words, in Alpyağıl's views not every understanding is based on an interpretation, since as the essays on the aesthetic experience and seeing-as have demonstrated, a text can also be understood without involving volition or words that express our understanding. As a result, Alpyağıl has offered a hermeneutical framework that challenges methodic approaches to Qur'an hermeneutics that envision understanding as a process that can always be mechanically induced and in discourse be expressed by applying a set of interpretation rules.

Conversely, by introducing a more direct and intuitive experience of understanding the Qur'an, Alpyağıl developed a hermeneutics which assumes that the full understanding of a religious text is only the prerogative of that text's community, rather than every potential audience that text might have. This was made evident by the fact that Alpyağıl argued that one of the conditions for fully understanding a

⁵¹³ Hence the reason why Korner named his study on Özsoy *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology*.

text is belief, and this by default precludes those with no faith in the Qur'an from fully understanding its message. This outlook, however, stands in stark contrast with the views of Cüendioğlu discussed in the previous chapter, since Cüendioğlu argued that reason and not faith is the ultimate arbiter or guarantor of our understanding of the Qur'an.

In between Subjective Scruples and Objective Historical Reconstruction: The Hermeneutics of Mustafa Öztürk

Introduction

Born in 1965 in Giresun (Turkey), Öztürk's foray into Islamic studies started with his training at one of Turkey's conventional religious lyceums (*Imam Hatip*). After graduation, Öztürk further advanced his religious education by attending a Turkish divinity school (*ilahiyat*). As his graduate thesis, Öztürk wrote a dissertation on the Bāṭinī tradition in *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, setting the first steps for what would become a long-standing academic career related to the historical tradition and problems of *tafsīr*. In addition to an illustrious research career in *tafsīr*, Öztürk has also published one volume of his own personal *tafsīr* of the Qur'an; which makes him the only author analysed in this thesis that has written an exegesis of the Qur'an.

Despite the breath and diversity of Öztürk's publications, there are certain overarching characteristics that define the works of Öztürk. First and foremost, unlike his peers Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu, Öztürk's works contain a very vocal critique of traditional ideas expressed in the fields of *fiqh* and *tafsīr*. The motivation behind this critique emerged from a personal struggle, which Öztürk describes as follows in one of the prefaces of his works: "these writings are a result of an effort to understand the divine speech (*ilahi kelam*) by a mind tormented (*sancılı zihin*) and disturbed by conventional ideas or stereotypical beliefs concerning Islam in general and the Qur'an in particular."⁵¹⁴ As a consequence, Öztürk does not merely research the history of *tafsīr* to regurgitate its fundamental ideas in a descriptive manner (*tasvir*), but he also seeks to analyse (*tahlil*) and critique (*tenkit*) the tradition of

⁵¹⁴ Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2011), 7.

tafsīr at various turns⁵¹⁵. As expressed by his own words, Öztürk does not only worry about “what is” (*olan*) but also about “what should be” (*olması gereken*)⁵¹⁶.

Öztürk’s dual commitment towards criticizing and revising traditional ideas, is what elevates his works from a mere study into the history of ideas in classical Islamic thinking. Accordingly, by engaging on a personal level with the fundamental theoretical elements of interpretation, Öztürk’s works become hermeneutical. It is particularly these theoretical reconsiderations of Öztürk that will take centre stage in the proceeding sections.

The quest for a normative hermeneutics is always pursued by Öztürk in a dialogical manner. Either by stirring up a conversation with other Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers in order to support his argument, or by demonstrating how the prior fails in presenting an adequate hermeneutics of the Qur’an. In the latter case Öztürk deconstructs the arguments made by Muslim thinkers, so that he may subsequently create an intellectual clearing for his own perspective on the matter.

A second defining characteristic of Öztürk’s works, is its historicist (*tarihselci*) approach towards understanding the Qur’an. Given the fact that historicism, like hermeneutics, has different meanings according to a particular context or author, it is important to define what the term means in reference to Öztürk’s works. In one of his latest works, Öztürk has offered some remarks that demarcate what historicism signifies for him. According to Öztürk, a historicist interpretation (*yorum*) and approach (*yaklaşım*), is at its very core an inquisition into the answer as to what the Qur’an tells or wishes to tell us in the present⁵¹⁷. However, since the present-day reader is not the direct addressee of the Qur’an, it is necessary to understand the Qur’an’s pertinence through a ‘historical detour’. In other words, by

⁵¹⁵ Öztürk, 7.

⁵¹⁶ Öztürk, 7.

⁵¹⁷ Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur’an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2018), 10.

first understanding what the Qur'an meant for its direct, historical addressees, and thereafter attempt to mediate its meaning with present-day circumstances.

While Öztürk is not an alumni of the Ankara School of Divinity, his hermeneutical thinking does share a fundamental premise with the works of the alumni from the Ankara School of Divinity, such as İlhami Güler and Omer Özsoy. The hermeneutical premise in question is the dialectical approach to the Qur'an as having both a historical component and transhistorical/universal aspect. This dialectic feature can also be discovered in the works of some thinkers affiliated with the Ankara School of Divinity. For example, Güler argues that while all God's universal religion (*dīn*), such as the belief in a monotheistic God, is transhistorical, God's revealed law has always been historically conditioned, and therefore, contingent⁵¹⁸. Öztürk, as we shall discover in the proceeding sections, also maintains a dialectical approach to the Qur'an by arguing that the Qur'an contains elements that are both contingent and transhistorical, universal and particular, irrelevant as well as relevant. Given this fundamental similarity in hermeneutics between the Ankara School and Öztürk, it is no surprise that the Ankara School of Theology Publishing House has also become the home for almost all of Öztürk's books, despite the fact that he has not formally studied or taught at the Ankara School of Divinity.

The fact that Öztürk neither graduated nor taught at the Ankara School of Divinity, could potentially be the reason as to why Körner neglected to include Öztürk in his book on revisionist Koran hermeneutics in Turkey, despite the impressive body of work Öztürk has produced, the revisionist nature of his works, and the similarity of Öztürk's ideas with members of the Ankara School⁵¹⁹. Nevertheless, in the later phase of his career, Körner did introduce Öztürk's work to the western world by translating one of Öztürk's articles into German, and by providing some reflections

⁵¹⁸ İlhami Güler, *Sabit Din Dinamik Şariat* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2012), 27.

⁵¹⁹ In *Revisionist Kur'an Hermeneutics*, Körner speaks only of wishing to analyze four authors belonging to the Ankara "tradition". However, Körner does not specify what this tradition exactly entails, nor what belonging to this tradition signifies. Körner, "Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology : Rethinking Islam," 62.

on some of the ideas of Öztürk. According to Körner, Öztürk is able to make an empathic case for an historical-critical approach to explaining the Qur'an that is earnest and aware of the shortcomings of tradition. However, while such an approach might find resonance (*gehör*) with non-Muslims, Körner doubts whether other Muslims sceptical of revisionist readings, can become convinced of the validity of the historical-critical approach by reading Öztürk's texts⁵²⁰. Nonetheless, other than Körner's insightful remarks, other valuable article translations⁵²¹, and certain footnotes, discussions of Öztürk's ideas are virtually non-existent in western literature. A matter also affirmed by Körner: "Mustafa Öztürk has as of yet received little attention outside of Turkey."⁵²²

The vocal nature of Öztürk's critique of tradition paired with some of his historicist claims, have also made Öztürk the most contested scholar amongst the three intellectuals studied in this dissertation. One controversial feature of Öztürk's, has to do with Öztürk's challenge to, what can be best described as, the 'principle of pertinence'. As Todorov explains this concept:

"In order to account for the triggering of the interpretative process, we must assume from the outset that the production and reception of discourse (of utterances, and not sentences) obey a very general rule of pertinence, according to which if a discourse exists there must be a reason for it. So that when at first glance a given discourse does not obey this rule, the receiver's spontaneous reaction is to determine whether the discourse might not reveal its pertinence through some particular manipulation. "Interpretation" (still in the narrow sense) is what we call this manipulation."⁵²³

⁵²⁰ Felix Körner, "Türkisch Islamische Theologie Im Aufbruch: Mustafa Öztürk," *Lebendiges Zeugnis* 63, no. 2 (2008): 107.

⁵²¹ Besides Körner, Zimmerman has also published a translation: Mustafa Öztürk, "Über Die Notwendigkeit Und Die Methoden Der Entmythologisierung Des Koran," trans. Johannes Zimmermann, *Die Welt Des Islams* 50, no. 2 (2010).

⁵²² "Mustafa Öztürk hat bisher außerhalb der Türkei noch wenig Beachtung gefunden." Felix Körner, "Modernistische Koranexegese in Der Türkei : Eine Diskussion Mit Mustafa Öztürk," in *Im Dienst Der Versöhnung* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2008), 13.

⁵²³ Todorov Tzvetan, *Symbolism and Interpretation*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 28.

As it will become more evident in the coming sections, Öztürk challenges the principle of pertinence in respect to the Qur'an by questioning whether all verses in the Qur'an are pertinent for a modern audience. Moreover, Öztürk does not believe that some verses should be manipulated, i.e. interpreted in order to reveal their pertinence to modern audiences. Some verses, Öztürk will argue, are merely pertinent to the historical situation in which they were conveyed.

Some conservative critics have taken note of such claims and have publicly rebuked Öztürk. Ihsan Şenocak, a conservative scholar who is known to critique the historical-critical view of the Qur'an adhered to by the Ankara School, has gone as far as to appeal and reproach the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). In the words of Şenocak:

"... Diyanet, you respond when the Qur'an is being offended in France. However, this person [referring to Öztürk], goes into *tafsir* classes, speaks of the Qur'an to the children of this nation; this man that enters the *tafsir* classes, subsequently says that some of the narratives of the Qur'an bear no truth. Tell me, what is the ruling concerning a person that holds such beliefs? What is the ruling concerning the one who says that some of the verses of the Qur'an are – God forbid (*haşa*) – fables (*masal*)?"⁵²⁴

A few of these controversies have had lasting consequences for Öztürk's life. For example, in 2018 Öztürk came forward with screenshots from a *fatwā* that was circulating in a WhatsApp group calling for Öztürk's death. Some members of this group shared the writing that "Öztürk has to be killed (*katledilmeli*), in case he does not repent (*tevbe etmezse*)"⁵²⁵ Moreover, perhaps due to these kinds of threats, Öztürk has closed his social media accounts, and no longer actively engages with the general public through social media.

⁵²⁴ "Prof. Dr. Mustafa Öztürk'e 'ölüm Fetvası' Hakkında Suç Duyurusu," Duvar, 2019, <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2019/01/04/prof-dr-mustafa-ozturke-olum-fetvasi-hakkinda-suc-duyurusu>.

⁵²⁵ "Prof. Dr. Mustafa Öztürk'e 'ölüm Fetvası' Hakkında Suç Duyurusu."

Despite the active resistance by various groups in Turkey to Öztürk's ideas, Öztürk remains both resolute and conspicuous in his hermeneutical method of approaching the Qur'an in a historical-critical manner. Öztürk argues that there are very few people committed to the historical-critical view of the Qur'an in Turkey. Furthermore, those who hold historicist ideas, are also reluctant to come forward. While he refrains from giving names, Öztürk claims that there are various fellow academics who are in reality "crypto-historicists" (*kripto tarihselci*) that have due to *zeitgeist* (*zamanın ruhu*) chosen to appear as traditionalists (*gelenekçi*). These academics, argues Öztürk, are forced to live double lives⁵²⁶.

Öztürk's unwavering commitment to a historical-critical view of the Qur'an was recast in one of his latest works *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular* (On the Qur'an and Historicism: Side Writings, Example Cases). Not only does Öztürk discuss and reaffirm his own historical-critical view of the Qur'an but also that of one of his biggest influences: Fazlur Rahman.

Fazlur Rahman, a modern intellectual of the Qur'an, became popular among certain Turkish Muslims due to his direct contact with Turkish students that attended his doctoral classes during the 70s, the subsequent translations of his works into Turkish, and the various symposiums held in Turkey in the 90s discussing Rahman's ideas⁵²⁷. Rahman's contextualist approach to the Qur'an was one of the fundamental reasons as to why certain Turkish intellectuals became enamoured by his ideas. As Wielandt recalls, certain Turkish intellectuals took particular interest in Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics, "because it facilitates a historical understanding of the Qur'ān in the sense of reading it within the original context for which it was formulated and then recontextualizing its message in view of the situation of

⁵²⁶ Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular*, 9.

⁵²⁷ Mustafa Öztürk, "Kur'an'ı Anlamada Tarihselciliğin İmkan, Sınır ve Sorunları," in *Kur'an'ı Anlama Yolunda: Kuramer Konferansları - I* (İstanbul: Kuramer, 2017), 24–30.

modern believers, without abandoning the belief that it is God's verbal revelation."

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In more technical terms, the interest in Rahman was partially spurred by his 'double movement theory'. Rahman describes the interpretative process in terms of two movements. The first movement attempts at understanding the given meaning of a statement in the Qur'an by studying the historical situation or problem to which it was the answer⁵²⁹. After establishing the meaning of a verse in relation to a historical situation or problem, the exegete continues to the second step, which "is to generalize those specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be "distilled" from specific texts in light of the sociohistorical background and the often-stated *rationes legis*."⁵³⁰

There is little doubt that Fazlur Rahman was a major source of inspiration for certain modern Turkish scholars⁵³¹, especially to scholars such as Öztürk who advocate a historical-critical view of the Qur'an. It is no surprise that some elements of Öztürk's thoughts are reminiscent of Rahman's works. One of the most conspicuous similarities, pertains to Rahman aforementioned two-tiered approach to the Qur'an. In other words, both authors propose the idea that the Qur'an must first be read in relation to the historical situation in which its verses were revealed, and then in respect to what these verses potentially signify for the present. Furthermore, both authors do not seek this latter significance via the Qur'an's historical idiosyncrasies but according to the more generic, universal principles behind the verses.

⁵²⁸ Rotraud Wielandt, "Main Trends of Islamic Theological Thought from the Late Nineteenth Century to Present Times," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. S Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 739.

⁵²⁹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 6.

⁵³⁰ Rahman, 6.

⁵³¹ Wielandt, "Main Trends of Islamic Theological Thought from the Late Nineteenth Century to Present Times," 739.

Unlike Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu, however, Öztürk has not published any work that solely focuses on the subjectivity-objectivity debates in Qur'an hermeneutics. Nevertheless, Öztürk has directly addressed at various turns different issues related to the problems of subjectivity and objectivity in Qur'an hermeneutics⁵³². Accordingly, it is possible to formulate an overall narrative from Öztürk's works that describes subjectivity vis-à-vis objectivity in interpretation in the thought of Öztürk. However, in order to construct such a narrative, it is necessary to venture through different tiers of Öztürk's thought. In the following sections, various levels of Öztürk's thinking will be discussed in order to describe the complex and multi-layered view of Öztürk on the status of subjectivity vis-à-vis objectivity in regard to the interpretation of the Qur'an.

Rehabilitating the historical

An important cornerstone of Öztürk's overall work is to rehabilitate the historical in relation to the Qur'an. In other words, to acknowledge the historicity of the Qur'an. Not for this acknowledgement to become a negation of the universal aspects of the Qur'an, i.e. its ability to address an audience beyond its initial revelation period⁵³³. Rather, as a sober corrective measure against an exaggerated interpretative stance that indiscriminately accords all elements of the Qur'an with transhistorical qualities.

⁵³² For example, in one of his works, Öztürk presents some of his views under the following heading *Yorum Mahiyeti ve Yorumda Nesnellik-Oznellik Meselesi* (The Essence of Interpretation and the Problem of Objectivity-Subjectivity in Interpretation); demonstrating thereby that he has at various turns of his writings addressed this epistemological issue.

⁵³³ Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular*, 50.

By acknowledging both qualities of the Qur'an, Öztürk opens the pathways to bifurcations, such as transhistorical-in-essence versus historical-in-form⁵³⁴, historical meaning versus contemporary meaning, and so forth. These consequent bifurcations have a consequence for the status of subjective understanding in Öztürk's Qur'an hermeneutics. To clarify, by differentiating between a historical and a contemporary meaning, Öztürk will on the one hand judge that the Qur'an has a necessary objective meaning determined by its original engagement with the Qur'an's historical audience, while simultaneously maintaining that its contemporary meaning becomes accomplished by deliberating anew on its message in reference to present-day subjective considerations.

In order to rehabilitate the historical dimensions of the Qur'an, Öztürk relies on a variety of different analyses and premises, depending on the context of the discussion. One key-premise is to historicize the appeal of the Qur'an. He argues that the present-day Muslim is not the direct addressee (*muhatap*) or the recipient of the Qur'an's address (*hitap*)⁵³⁵. Rather, as Öztürk states, "The Qur'an's direct addressees are the Arabs of the Prophet's time."⁵³⁶ As such, by being the indirect addressee of the Qur'an, and therefore, unable to be addressed by the Qur'an "as-is", the present-day reader can only reconstruct the pertinence of the appeal of the Qur'an through mediation. That is to say, the contemporary reader or hearer must investigate how the appeal of the Qur'an is still relevant to them in the here and now despite not being its direct or original addressee.

While this might seem like a very logical hermeneutical premise, Öztürk has argued that both classical as well as modern Muslim intellectuals have been very reluctant

⁵³⁴ The Turkish concepts of *tarih-üstü* and *tarihsel* are respectively translated as 'transhistorical' and 'historical'. The notion of 'trans' in transhistorical is substituted for the 'üstü' in *tarih-üstü*, which conventionally speaking relates to something 'above', and in this context to 'history transcending', thus transhistorical. Such a translation is also supported by Körner in his translation of *tarih-üstü* as *Übergeschichtlichkeit*. See Körner, "Modernistische Koranexegese in Der Türkei : Eine Diskussion Mit Mustafa Öztürk."

⁵³⁵ Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2015), 18.

⁵³⁶ Öztürk, 18.

to historicize the Qur'an's address. According to Öztürk, Muhammad Asad's (d.1992) interpretation of verse 88:17 would be a case in point of such forced universalist readings of the Qur'an. Instead of translating the Arabic *ibil* as "camels", as many other translators such as Yusuf Ali and Pickthall have done, Asad has suggested the translation "clouds pregnant with water". For Asad, translating *ibil* as camels would be too provincial, and not proper to the Qur'an's universal appeal:

"If the term were used in the sense of "camels", the reference to it in the above verse would have been primarily - if not exclusively - addressed to the Arabian contemporaries of the Prophet, to whom the camel was always an object of admiration on account of its outstanding endurance, the many uses to which it could be put (riding, load-bearing, and as a source of milk, flesh and fine wool) and its indispensability to people living amid deserts. But precisely because a reference to "camels" would restrict its significance to people of a particular environment and a particular time (without even the benefit of a historical allusion to past events), it must be ruled out here, for the Qur'anic appeals to observe the wonders of the God-created universe are invariably directed at people of all times and all environments."⁵³⁷

For Öztürk such excessive universalisations of the Qur'an's address are not sustainable, on account of the various pathologies caused by its insistence. These pathologies are defined as follows by Öztürk: embarrassed/apologetic universalism (*mahçup evrensellik*), deceptive universalism (*muğfil evrenselcilik*), and noxious universalism (*müstekreh evrensilcilik*). In other words, if someone were to ignore the historical aspects of the Qur'an, because they insist that the Qur'an is always universally pertinent, they would by default have to succumb to either of these pathologies to warrant the universal nature of the Qur'an. Some interpreters will thus feel embarrassed, because they will have to defend certain verses that they feel are conflicting with their modern sensibilities. As a result, rather than outright acknowledging that these verses historically signified what they do, such universalists will seek to find a different more appropriate universally pertinent meaning behind certain verses. Other interpreters, however, might in such a case

⁵³⁷ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, n.d.), 949; Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 19–20.

offer deceptive interpretations that either restricts (*hasıraltı almak*) verses or acts as if they do not exist (*görmezden gelmek*)⁵³⁸. Finally, some interpreters will maintain an attitude that states “The Qur’an is universal as long as its rules do not force or bind me.” Unlike the previous two categories, Öztürk does provide an example of the latter. Accordingly, Öztürk argues that a Muslim woman might state that a ruling concerning the freedom of polygyny is a universally valid rule as long as it is not incumbent upon her to be part of a polygamous relationship. In other words, such a person would acknowledge the universal pertinence of polygamy but would avert its application on account of a personal aversion to polygamy.

This excessive insistence on the universality of the Qur’an can according to Öztürk be retraced to three principal theoretical causes in tradition⁵³⁹. These causes are described by Öztürk as follows: thinking that the speech of God is inseparable from the eternal essence of God, subscribing to the notion that one shall not consider the particularity of the cause but the generality of statements, and finally, the Qur’an’s seeming self-description. All three causes are addressed and deconstructed by Öztürk in order to establish a clearing for his own hermeneutical understanding.

Excessive universalist readings of their Qur’an are first of all rooted in the theological premise that God as well as His speech are eternal. Primarily, because God’s speech is conceptualized as being part of God’s knowledge, and therefore, to be part of God’s attributes. Accordingly, since God and His attributes are eternal, and speech is one of His attributes, His speech must therefore also be eternal⁵⁴⁰. By committing to this idea, classical Sunni theologians belonging to the Ash‘arī or traditionalist⁵⁴¹ schools have gone through great lengths in order to stave off the

⁵³⁸ Öztürk, *Kur’an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 69.

⁵³⁹ Öztürk, 72.

⁵⁴⁰ Öztürk, 72–73.

⁵⁴¹ Öztürk calls them ‘Selefiyye’, which, as the context seems to indicate, refers to the *Ahl al- Ḥadīth* (partisans of traditions). See: J. Schacht, “Ahl Al-Ḥadīth,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Encyclopaedia of Islam (Brill, 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com:443/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ahl-al-hadith-SIM_0379.

idea that the Qur'an was not eternal but created. Unfortunately, as Öztürk argues, some of these same theologians resorted at times to weak reports (*ḥadīth*) and even ideas that contradicted with common sense principles. According to Öztürk, a clear example of the latter is the traditionalist conviction that the written letters of the Qur'an were even eternal⁵⁴².

Not all grounds for excessive universalism, are theological according to Öztürk. There is also a particular hermeneutical reason for such a position. This reason pertains to the accepted interpretative principle within classical jurisprudence and exegesis, where it is stated that the particularity of the cause (*sebeḥ*) will not be considered, but the generality of the statement (*lafzın umumiliği*)⁵⁴³. To further clarify this principle, it is a well-documented fact that certain verses of the Qur'an were revealed in response to the particular actions of specific persons that lived during the time of the revelation. Nevertheless, rather than understanding this causal relationship between specific situations and the content of the Qur'an to be restricted to those specific situations, the general theoretical perspective adhered to by jurists and *tafsīr* scholars was to read the response as transcending the particularity of its cause. Moreover, the fact that the Qur'an was speaking in generalities could only add further support to why the generality of the statement (*lafzın umumiliği*) was to be considered, rather than the particularity of the cause (*sebeḥ*) behind the statement.

Öztürk questions whether statements are truly general or made to be general on account of the abovementioned principle of interpretation?⁵⁴⁴ For, as Öztürk

⁵⁴² Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 75.

⁵⁴³ Öztürk is referring to the classical tenet that states *al-ibratu bi 'umūm al-lafz, lā bi khuṣūṣ al-sabab* ("the generality of the statement will be considered, not the particularity of [its] cause"). While this tenet can be found reiterated in principle *usūl al-fiqh* works belonging to Shāfi'ī and Ḥanafī scholars, al-Razī (d. 1210) reports that some students of al-Shāfi'ī have argued the opposite. In other words, scholars such as Abū Thawr (d. 854) and al-Muzanī (d. 878) argued that the particularity of the cause for a statement will be leading, and not the generality of the statements in which the Qur'an addresses an issue. Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maḥṣūl Fī 'Ilm Al-Uṣūl* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-ilmiyah, 1999), 370.

⁵⁴⁴ That is, not the particular cause, but the generality of the statements will be considered.

retorts, the Arabic language also permits, and in some cases as Öztürk argues, necessitates reading seemingly general statements in more restricted ways. Öztürk presents a clear example of why some seemingly general statements should still be read in restricted ways, by referring to the word *al-insān* in the Qur'an. Taken at face value, one would conventionally be inclined to read this word as "humankind". Accordingly, there are plenty of verses to be found in the Qur'an that utter very harsh criticism about *al-insān*. If we were to de-historicise such verses and read them in unrestricted, universal terms, that is as applying to the entire species of humankind, Muslims would have to subscribe to a very negative and unoptimistic outlook on humankind, since God, their creator, criticizes *al-insān* at various turns. However, on the other hand, if we were to contextualise such verses in terms of their original historical referents, we would inevitably be able to restrict their meaning in relation to these referents, and thereby avoid a misanthropic reading of the Qur'an. In such cases *al-insān*, and its concomitant critique, would only refer to a handful of people.

Based on these claims, Öztürk regards the argument from the Qur'an's own self-description to be the strongest. After all, as Öztürk argues, the Prophet's mission has been described by verse 34:28 as being *kāffatan li al-nās*, which straightforwardly translates "to all of humankind". Additionally, there are other verses of the Qur'an that start with the following address *yā ayyuhā al-nās*, which can be understood as "o ye people!". As such, it is quite enticing to believe that the Qur'an's message is not specific to a certain audience or time and that the Qur'an universally addresses all of humankind⁵⁴⁵. A plausibility that is only further supported by certain statements of the Prophet, such as "I have been sent to the red [skinned] as well as the fair [skinned]."⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁵ Although not an example presented by Öztürk, Yusuf Ali's translation of the verse 34:28 is a clear case in point of such a belief: "We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not." It should be noted, given the context of the present discussion, how Yusuf Ali substitutes the earlier *kāffatan li al-nās* for the English "universal (Messenger) to man".

⁵⁴⁶ Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 82.

As with the prior arguments for universalist readings, Öztürk retorts whether the earlier discussed expressions in the Qur'an, are truly purporting a generic meaning. Öztürk brings evidence from the fields of classical jurisprudence and exegesis that question such readings. For example, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) has argued that it is not possible to elicit a universal pertinence from the Qur'an's statements alone (*mujarrad al-alfāz*)⁵⁴⁷. On the contrary, there is always a need for accompanying evidence in order to argue that a Qur'anic injunction is not context specific, and accordingly, relevant to all occasions⁵⁴⁸. Moreover, as al-Ghazālī argued, the Prophet being sent to all of humankind, does not necessarily mean that his message addresses everyone in homogenous terms⁵⁴⁹. Similarly, different exegetes, such as Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200), have explained the earlier mentioned *yā ayyuhā al-nās* not as "o ye people" but in a more restricted sense as "people of Mecca"⁵⁵⁰. The famous classical *tafsīr* scholar and linguist al-Zamaksharī (d. 1144), even claimed that interpreting the earlier mentioned *kāffatan li al-nās* as "all of humankind" is not grammatically possible⁵⁵¹. Rather, as Öztürk demonstrates, there exists a possibility to read *kāffatan li al-nās* as "to prevent Meccan people", which inevitably renders verse 34:28 in the following, more restricted manner: "We have merely sent you to hinder the Meccan people from polytheism and disbelieve."

As mentioned earlier, the historical nature of the Qur'an is rehabilitated to coexist with the premise that the Qur'an is transhistorical, and not to completely negate any transhistorical potential. However, it should also not be forgotten that Öztürk's historicism is a corrective to an excessive universalism. This inevitably means that in Öztürk's framework the transhistorical elements of the Qur'an are co-defined by

⁵⁴⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaşfa Min 'Ilm Al-Uşul*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Sader, 2010), 51; Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 84.

⁵⁴⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaşfa Min 'Ilm Al-Uşul*, 2:51; Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 84.

⁵⁴⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaşfa Min 'Ilm Al-Uşul*, 2:51–52; Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 84.

⁵⁵⁰ Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 85.

⁵⁵¹ Öztürk, 86.

the historicity of the Qur'an. As such, despite having a universalist perspective on the Qur'an, and thereby, acknowledging the history-transcending nature of the Qur'an, Öztürk does so with certain qualifications.

This double commitment to the historical and transhistorical qualities of the Qur'an is determined in Öztürk's thinking by a set of interrelated conceptual bifurcations. Among the key distinctions Öztürk makes, is the differentiation between address and message (*hitap-mesaj*) and essence and form (*öz-suret*). By virtue of these distinctions Öztürk will extend the historical-transhistorical/universal dichotomy further and argue that the Qur'an is in address and form historical, while in its underlying message and core the Qur'an is universal and transhistorical.

By distinguishing between address and message, Öztürk brings the earlier discussed circle to a close that started with the notion that the present-day subject was not the direct addressee of the Qur'an; even if, as Öztürk's prior critique demonstrated, one might be inclined to believe otherwise, because of the Qur'an's seemingly general expressions. The address of the Qur'an as exemplified by its vocative expressions ("O believers!") are therefore technically speaking only directed towards the historical audience present during the revelation of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Qur'an does not speak to a contemporary audience. Rather, as Öztürk argues, it is not the historical address but the essential message that speaks or should speak to a contemporary audience.

Various elements of the Qur'an have been discerned by Öztürk to be truly universally relevant. In one of his earlier works, Öztürk argued that the Qur'an contains a set of universal themes, which can be recognised by their consistent repetition throughout the history of prophecy: "All themes that have existed during every moment of history, and as such, have been expressed in the message of every prophet, are transhistorical (*tarih-üstüdür*)."⁵⁵² Öztürk follows this statement with

⁵⁵² Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 17.

three beliefs that are exemplary of the universal concerns of the Qur'an: the belief in God's absolute unity in respect to His divinity (*uluhiyet*) and lordship (*rububiyet*), the belief in a hereafter, and the advocacy of a variety of important virtues, such as being kind to one's parents, to be just, and to help the destitute⁵⁵³. A similar but different reformulation of which aspects of the Qur'an are universal, can also be discovered in a later work of Öztürk : "in respect to its base (faith, ethics, spirituality) the Qur'an is universal, while in respect to its branches (social order and law) it is historical."⁵⁵⁴ In the case of the prior, Öztürk has additionally emphasised the primacy of articles of faith over all other elements of the Qur'an's message, since he argues that the most universal aspect of the Qur'an's universality are related to its articles of faith (*inanç ilkeleriyle ilgilidir*)⁵⁵⁵.

Öztürk continues to further nuance his views on the dialectics between transhistorical-historical, by arguing the possibility that certain verses of the Qur'an are in form (*suret*) particular to a historical situation, while in essence (*öz*), that is their underlying message, transhistorical and universally relevant. As Öztürk states, "the Qur'an is an address that considers the situation at hand (*verili durum*) of the Prophet's time. Accordingly, even the transhistorical messages of the Qur'an have been presented in forms that express the situation at hand."⁵⁵⁶ To illustrate this, let us look at verse 31:14: "And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning". This verse, as Öztürk argues, presents a universal message through a frame of reference that was particular to a historical practice. Put differently, verse 31:14 reminds its audience of the universal injunction to be kind to their parents, through a reference to a historical practice: two years of weaning⁵⁵⁷. Likewise, to refer to another example by Öztürk, the universal fact of God's absolute authority over the universe, was made relatable to the Arab recipients of the Qur'an through the use

⁵⁵³ Öztürk, 17.

⁵⁵⁴ Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 93.

⁵⁵⁵ Öztürk, 87.

⁵⁵⁶ Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 21.

⁵⁵⁷ Öztürk, 21.

of provincial regal imagery. To clarify, by describing God as governing the universe from a throne situated above the highest of heavens, the Arab recipients of the Qur'an who were already familiar with monarchs, were told of God's absolute dominion in terms that they could relate to⁵⁵⁸.

The two stages of interpretation: reconstruction and mediation

Both these degrees of differentiation applied by Öztürk between historical/particular-in-form and transhistorical/general-in-essence, become the very foundation of the two-stage hermeneutics of Öztürk. This two-stage hermeneutics can be delineated in terms of reconstruction and mediation. First reconstructing the meaning of the Qur'an within its historical horizon, and then relating it to the present⁵⁵⁹. While the first stage answers the question as to what the Qur'an meant in the past, the latter revolves around the question as to how and what a modern-day reader can sensibly appropriate from the Qur'an's contents given the fact that the form wherein this content was delivered was conditioned for a specific historical understanding. Moreover, the prior stage emphasises the objective relationship to the text, and the latter the more subjective relationship to the text.

These two stages of reconstruction and mediation do not only harken back to the earlier mentioned bifurcations but also to Öztürk's understanding of the difference between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, and how this difference relates to the disciplines of *tafsīr*, *kalām* and *fiqh*. *Tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* are distinguished by Öztürk in similar lines to how the classical scholar al-Mātūrīdī (d. 944) differentiated between these interpretative activities. According to al-Matūrīdī, *tafsīr* concerns itself with elucidating what God's intention was towards the first recipients of the Qur'an⁵⁶⁰. *Ta'wīl* on the other

⁵⁵⁸ Öztürk, 24.

⁵⁵⁹ Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular*, 13.

⁵⁶⁰ Mustafa Öztürk, "Kur'an Vahyinin Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanması," in *Tefsir Geleneğinde Anlam-Yorum Nüzul-Siret İlişkisi*, ed. Mustafa Öztürk (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2017), 17.

hand, is to bring the original meaning (*özgün anlam*) into later times, as well as reinterpret this original meaning in renewed circumstances⁵⁶¹. Moreover, while the science of *tafsîr*, as the name already states, concerns itself with the activity of *tafsîr*, *fiqh* and *kalām* revolve mainly around *ta'wîl*:

“The Qur’an does not establish a relationship with humans living in time periods distant from its revelation by virtue of the science of *tafsîr*. On the contrary, it establishes this relationship with the science of *kalām* where beliefs (*itikâd’i alan*) are concerned, and *fiqh* where praxis (*ameli alan*) is concerned. For, while the science of *tafsîr* focuses on what the Qur’an has said in the context of its revelation, the sciences of *kalām* and *fiqh* busy themselves with the problem of what the Qur’an wants to say in the present and the future.”⁵⁶²

In other words, as Öztürk summarises: “*Tafsîr* is the science that looks back and understands, while *fiqh* and *kalām* are the sciences that look forward through living [what is understood].”⁵⁶³

Among the more pertinent consequences of this bifurcation between *tafsîr* and *ta'wîl*, is the fact that two meanings are ascribed to the Qur’an: past and present. Accordingly, rather than contextualising a primary and secondary meaning of the Qur’an in terms of superficial versus deeper meanings, or literal versus allegorical meanings, as mystics might have done in the past, the primary and secondary meaning in Öztürk’s framework revolves around historical and contemporary/future. The prior being often described by Öztürk in terms of ‘first and principal meaning’ (*ilk ve asli mana*)⁵⁶⁴, ‘principal and historical meaning’ (*asli ve tarihi anlam*)⁵⁶⁵, as well as ‘original meaning’ (*özgün anlam*)⁵⁶⁶.

Reconstruction: an archaeology of meaning

⁵⁶¹ Öztürk, 17.

⁵⁶² Mustafa Öztürk, *İlahi Hitabın Tefsiri - 1*, vol. 1 (Ankara: Ankara Okulu, 2018), 30.

⁵⁶³ Öztürk, “Kur’an’ı Anlamada Tarihselciliğin İmkan, Sınır ve Sorunları,” 255.

⁵⁶⁴ *Tafsîr*, p. 38

⁵⁶⁵ Kuramer, p. 263

⁵⁶⁶ Understanding and Interpretation, p. 18

Since the first step of interpretation is tasked with reconstructing the divine intent directed towards the first recipients of the Qur'an, it must engage in a process which Öztürk has described as an 'archaeology of meaning' (*anlam arkeolojisi*). This process involves working through language (*dil*), history (*tarih*), and the oral tradition (*rivayet*) of Islam⁵⁶⁷. The desired outcome of this archaeology is to build a repository of meaning upon which the sciences of kalam and *fiqh* can derive their inspiration and develop new practical and religious meanings from the Qur'an for the present day⁵⁶⁸.

The first point of departure within this archaeological uncovering of the Qur'an's meanings, is by decoding the Qur'an's linguistic codes. According to Öztürk, no mediation can ever be initiated without first understanding what a text means. Given the fact that the Qur'an stands in front of us as codified text, it follows that its mediation must also begin by first decoding its linguistic codes:

"Without doubt, the assimilation and internalization of the divine message, is only possible by correctly understanding it. However, to understand, we have to decode the linguistic codes of the text that stands in front of us as a written document. Technically speaking, at this level of understanding and interpretation, approaching the Qur'an as an epistemic object (*epistemik bir nesne*) becomes inescapable."⁵⁶⁹

Decoding the linguistic codes of the Qur'an is not something that can be done merely in reference to the strict confines of the text's linguistic materiality but has to be reconstructed in relation to the historical context that is external to the text. Primarily, because, as Öztürk argues, meaning is never constituted without context: "meaning is not a thing hidden in mere words and/or present in the text waiting to be transferred - as is - to our present. Rather, meaning is constituted through context (*bağlam*)."⁵⁷⁰ As such, the confines of interpretation should not be

⁵⁶⁷ *Tafsir*, p. 39

⁵⁶⁸ Kuramer, p. 254

⁵⁶⁹ Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an'ı Kendi Tarihinde Okumak : Tefsirde Anakronizme Ret Yazıları* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu, 2013), 41.

⁵⁷⁰ Usul, p. 93

restricted to the relationship between expressions and meaning (*lafız-mana*) but text and history (*metin-tarih*)⁵⁷¹.

By reframing the scope of understanding in terms of text and history, Öztürk reiterates the dialectical relationship between history and the formation of the Qur'an's text – something already hinted towards with the earlier bifurcation between the Qur'an's historical content and its transhistorical message. For Öztürk it is a given that "the content of the Qur'an (*Kur'an'daki muhteva*) was formed from the dialectical relationship between God and humans."⁵⁷² Otherwise, as Öztürk states, we would have to admit that God is inconsiderate of the circumstances surrounding the first recipients of the Qur'an, which would lead to a fatalistic view of revelation. Öztürk argues that "to think that the elements of man, history and society are not of influence during the time of revelation, is equal to saying that God desired from the onset (*ibtidaen*) to address, and that, accordingly, He directed (*tahvil*) the state and conditions of the human addressees in accordance with what He wanted to say."⁵⁷³ In other words, if God's address does not adapt to history, then it must mean that the events of history were laid out in pre-advance by God, so that God would have the right audience and circumstances for His message to be relevant. Otherwise, if history would be independent of God's message, while God's message has been laid out in advance, there would be a risk that God would say things that do not conform with the volatility of the circumstances at hand. On the contrary, as Öztürk argues, "God decides when He will descend his revelation, but the subject of revelation is defined by what humans do"⁵⁷⁴.

This tight association between text and history necessitates that the Qur'an should be read alongside other sources that disclose the historical experience of the Qur'an. At various turns, Öztürk has further specified what some of these sources

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p. 26

⁵⁷² Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 264.

⁵⁷³ Öztürk, 264.

⁵⁷⁴ Öztürk, 264.

are. Accordingly, one of the first sources mentioned by Öztürk is the Prophet's biography (*sīra*): "it should be put forward that what the divine intent (*ilahi irade*) wants, should be gathered from reading the Qur'an in parallel to its historical particularity (*tarihsel özgüllüğü*) and the Prophet's biography."⁵⁷⁵ Another obvious source mentioned by Öztürk is the literature explaining the causes for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). Finally, there is also the *sunna*. However, as Öztürk has argued, the idea of *sunna* should not be restricted to documented reports that were related from the Prophet (*metinleşmiş hadisler*). Rather, the *sunna* should be understood in broader terms as a way of Islam (*Müslümanlık*) that was transmitted from the Prophet's generation onwards and has since then become part of the genetic code (*genetik kod*) of the larger Islamic community⁵⁷⁶.

Mediation

After reconstructing the objective meaning intended for the Qur'an's initial audience, the question arises as to how this meaning can be brought into pertinence for the present-day reader of the Qur'an. As previously stated, it is at this step of Öztürk's hermeneutics wherein subjectivity plays a more important constructive role, since it is at this step that the second meaning of the Qur'an is constructed. This is the meaning that can be derived from a dialogue between the Qur'an's initial meaning and present/future subjective circumstances. Accordingly, Öztürk's work deals with the parameters of this dialogue in reference to the following topics: narratives (*kasas*), theology (*îtikad*), and jurisprudence (*ahkam*). However, in each case with a reference to the earlier discussed dialectics of historical-transhistorical. In the following section all three topics will be discussed in order to further gain insights into Öztürk's specific views on the limitations and possibilities of understanding the Qur'an either subjectively or objectively.

⁵⁷⁵ Mustafa Öztürk, *Tefsir Tarihi Araştırmaları* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2011), 26.

⁵⁷⁶ Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 27.

The inescapable particularity of narratives

The Qur'an contains a variety of narratives that speak of experiences not belonging to the first recipients of the Qur'an but to other actors. Examples belonging to this category, are narratives concerning Adam and Satan, the prophets of Israel, or the peoples of Ad and Thamud. While these narratives are pre-dominantly understood to be historical in character, recent scholarship in the fields of Biblical and Qur'an hermeneutics have taken a renewed interest into the status of these narratives, inquiring whether these narratives are in character mythological rather than empirical. Following this trend, Öztürk has also readdressed the problem of the status of the narratives within the Qur'an.

Among the more salient sub-problems Öztürk addresses is the question concerning the purposes of the narratives of the Qur'an. Accordingly, three purposes (*gaye-amaç*) are ascribed by Öztürk to the narratives of the Qur'an: guiding people towards the assertion that Allah is the only god (*tek gerçek tanrı*)⁵⁷⁷, to morally support the Prophet and the believers⁵⁷⁸, and finally, to provide ethico-religious profundities/lessons (*ibretler*)⁵⁷⁹. While the first and last purposes might be relevant on a transhistorical level, it is not clear how the second purpose can be mediated into the present, since it is rooted in a specific historical problem. In such cases, the reader might have to admit that there is no transcendent, objective meaning to be appropriated into the present from these narratives, other than the acknowledgement of the historicity of these narratives⁵⁸⁰.

⁵⁷⁷ Mustafa Öztürk, *Kıssaların Dili* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2013), 37.

⁵⁷⁸ Öztürk, 38.

⁵⁷⁹ Öztürk, 38.

⁵⁸⁰ This is clearly admitted to by Öztürk by arguing that some narrations are merely the answer to some historically contingent questions, and therefore, "it can even be said that some narratives do not contain any ethico-religious message." Öztürk, 102.

The latter possibility, in other words the unassimilable nature of certain narratives, is elaborated by Öztürk in reference to two specific cases within the Qur'an: the narrative concerning the *Ashāb al-Kahf* (People of the Cave) and the narrative concerning *Dhū al-Qarnayn* (Possessor of Two Horns). There is no question about the abstract nature of these narratives, most evident by the fact that no concrete names, places or dates are presented within these narratives. From this fact, Öztürk infers that these narratives were not meant to present historical and factual data, nor any ethico-religious message; otherwise such narratives would have done so explicitly⁵⁸¹. Rather, these kinds of narratives were merely meant to support the Prophet by providing an answer to the questions set by the Prophet's detractors.

Öztürk supports his historicist claim by turning to the general tradition concerning these narratives. According to tradition, these narratives were revealed as an answer to the questions posed by the Prophet's detractors. As history recalls, the polytheists inquired into the status of Prophet with the Jews of Medina. In response, the Jews of Medina instructed them as follows: "ask Muhammad three questions. If he is able to answer these questions, he is a Prophet. However, if he is unable to answer them, then he is not a prophet, and you can do with him as you please."⁵⁸² As such, the following three questions were asked: what is the story concerning the youth that escaped their homeland, the man who travelled to the ends of the west and the east, and what is the quiddity of the spirit?⁵⁸³ The answers to the first two questions became the narratives of the People of the Cave and Dhū al-Qarnayn.

If one were to make more of these narratives by de-historicizing them and arguing that they harbour various transcendent truths, it would lead according to Öztürk to forced and fanciful interpretations (*hayali yorumlar*)⁵⁸⁴, that might even contradict

⁵⁸¹ Öztürk, 46.

⁵⁸² Öztürk cites Ibn Hishām. Öztürk, 45. Ibn Al-Hishām, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabawiyya Li Ibn Al-Hishām*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-Ilmiyya, n.d.), 301.

⁵⁸³ Öztürk, *Kıssaların Dili*, 45.

⁵⁸⁴ Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an Kıssalarının Mahiyeti* (Istanbul: Kuramer, 2017), 19.

the Qur'an's message. One example of the prior, is the scientist reading arguing that Dhū al-Qarnayn might be a space traveller who journeyed through various galaxies⁵⁸⁵. Another example would pertain to the earlier mentioned narrative of the People of Cave. As the narrative goes, various young men sought refuge in a cave from a despotic ruler. Öztürk asks rhetorically if present-day Muslims ought to also seek refuge in a cave when confronted with oppression? If this is the message to be inferred, then to whom is the message addressed within the Qur'an that commands to always incite the good and forbid the wrong within the public domain?⁵⁸⁶ Does the one message contradict not the other?

Rediscovering God

Historicity is not only limited to the narratives but also pertains to the theology of the Qur'an. God's divinity (*uluhiyet*) as well as absolute unity (*tevhid*) has, according to mainstream Islamic views, been consistently asserted by many different prophets throughout history. However, as Öztürk argues, while the proclamation of God's unity has never changed throughout history, other aspects, such as the names wherewith God was referenced, e.g. Elohim, Yahweh, and Allah, have. In other words, to reiterate Öztürk's metaphor: while the message enveloped (*mazruf*) has been transhistorical, its envelope (*zarf*) has been historically defined. Moreover, while the prior might be absolute and objective, i.e. signify a meaning that can be recurrently identified, the latter is contingent and rooted in culture: "However, when the three great religions are considered (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), it can be seen that each religion and generation has a subjectively valid (*kendisi için*) idea (*imge*) of God, rather than an objective (*nesnel*) idea of God."⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵ The tone in which Öztürk mentions this is one of perplexity. That is, Öztürk cannot fathom how a historical message as the Qur'an is being read by some present-day interpreters in ways that are almost reminiscent of science-fiction literature. Öztürk, *Kıssaların Dili*, 46.

⁵⁸⁶ Öztürk, 47.

⁵⁸⁷ Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 25.

Hence, it is no surprise to Öztürk that the Qur'an depicted God as a king, because a king symbolised the greatest possible authority to the early Arab recipients of the Qur'an⁵⁸⁸.

Part of the provincial nature of the Qur'an's theological imagery is due to the nature of language itself. Language is a dynamic entity with its own historicity. As Öztürk states, "The language of the Qur'an is not absolute (*mutlak*), primordial (*kadim*) [but] the language of a particular human experience, tradition, history, and culture."⁵⁸⁹ Öztürk refers in this regard to the Heideggerian metaphor that *Sprache ist das Haus des Seins* (language is the home of being). Arabic, argues Öztürk, "is also the house of the Arab's being (*arabi varlığın meskeni*)."⁵⁸⁹ Since God utilises Arabic, God speaks by default in terms that stem from the Arabs culture and history.

While the previously discussed examples and context demonstrates the interreligious historicity of how God is conceptualised, Öztürk also notes a degree of historicity within the larger tradition of Islam itself. These observations by Öztürk's are rooted in an analysis of two classical disciplines: *tafsir* and *kalām*. According to Öztürk, both disciplines bear witness to the way in which ideas concerning God have changed and evolved within the overall Muslim community.

In respect to *tafsir*, Öztürk relates how the word *rab* was transformed from its primary, historical meaning within the exegetical tradition. As Öztürk recounts, the Qur'an describes God as *rab* (lord), while we, His human creation, are designated as *'abd* (slave). These notions which were very familiar to the early recipients of the Qur'an, were carefully selected in order to challenge the concept of God that the Meccan polytheists had. The Meccan polytheists, while they did believe God created everything, did not believe that God intervened with human life. Not God,

⁵⁸⁸ Öztürk, 24.

⁵⁸⁹ Öztürk, "Kur'an'ı Anlamada Tarihselciliğin İmkan, Sınır ve Sorunları," 251.

but fate (*dahr*) governed their lives. By claiming God’s lordship over humans, a revised concept of God was brought forward wherein God was described as having mastery over people’s life⁵⁹⁰. However, in later exegetical works, Öztürk states that God’s lordship moved away from its domineering connotations, to one that laid more emphasis on education (*eğitme*) and cultivation (*yetiştirme*), rather than authority⁵⁹¹.

Similarly, in the instance of kalam, there is a clear discrepancy to be noted between some of the earlier and later generations of theologians and how they envisioned God. For example, the Qur’an states that God is to be found in the heavens (*fī al-samā’*). Early theologians such as Ahmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855) and Sa’īd al-Dārimī (d. 893), have taken this statement literally, and even argued the heretical status of those who understand God to be omnipresent⁵⁹². However, as Öztürk notes, later theologians leading up to the present, have interpreted “being in heaven” as God being above everything in terms of authority (*saltanat*) and power (*kudret*)⁵⁹³—arguing that this is the proper way of thinking about God (*sahih Allah tassavuru*). In other words, what used to be unthinkable and heretic notions of God, became mainstream, and what used to be the default way of thinking about God, became itself contested.

In conclusion, the historicity of Islam’s theology as witnessed by the traditions of *tafsīr* and kalam ratifies the possibility of future, different theologies. In other words, as past generations have demonstrated how they revised their theological notions in relation to previous generations, so – Öztürk argues - can subsequent generations also revise their theology in relation to the past. Accordingly, new

⁵⁹⁰ Öztürk, 252.

⁵⁹¹ Öztürk does not name the later exegetical works in which this shift in emphasis has occurred. He does refer to al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 923) *tafsīr* as a source in which *rab* signified authority. Öztürk’s abstinence from naming specific sources could be attributed to the fact that his ideas were voiced in the context of an academic conference. In other words, to an audience that was already familiar with the source material, and therefore, not in need of specific titles. Öztürk, 252.

⁵⁹² Öztürk, 250.

⁵⁹³ Öztürk, 250; Mustafa Öztürk, *Söyleşiler, Polemikler* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2015), 110.

generations can revise the meaning of what a token revealed by the Qur'an, such as "the Almighty", signifies for them subjectively. In other words, they can apply their personal *ta'wīl* to certain notions. However, it can be gathered from Öztürk's works that such revisions do not happen leisurely but are rather preceded by certain theological conceptions becoming no longer tentative to a certain age: "However, depending on certain theological concerns and discussions, or philosophical ideas, a conceptualisation of God belonging to a certain time frame could become problematic in another period. In such an instance, a new conceptualisation of God needs to be constructed."⁵⁹⁴

The teleology of the Sharī'a

Besides narratives and theology, the Qur'an also expresses judgments concerning practical and societal matters. Verses that contain legal content, are called by Öztürk *ahkam ayetleri* (lit. 'verses that contain rulings'). Akin to the earlier categories, i.e. narratives or descriptions of God, verses that pass judgements on practical matters, are according to Öztürk also defined by the dialectics of revelation and context of revelation: "It is our contestation, that God revealed all verses, legal verses (*ahkam ayetleri*) included, with consideration of the current state of praxis (*fiili durumlar*) of the people that witnessed the Prophet and the environment of the revelation."⁵⁹⁵ Moreover, similar to the previous categories, Öztürk also distinguishes between the contingent and transhistorical qualities of the Qur'an's legal verses, and defines the parameters of subjective mediation accordingly.

For Öztürk, a proper separation between the transhistorical and historical in respect to legal rulings, is necessary in order to escape the pitfalls of ugly analogies (*iğreti benzerlikler*). In other words, if one were to wholly argue that the Qur'an's legal

⁵⁹⁴ Öztürk, "Kur'an'ı Anlamada Tarihselciliğin İmkan, Sınır ve Sorunları," 253.

⁵⁹⁵ Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 28.

dimensions are universal, transcendent, and therefore, transhistorical, they would have to for example relate these attributes to the Qur'an's acknowledgement of the institution of slavery, which runs against some of our modern-day moral sensibilities. As a result, rather than accepting the historical reality of the institution of slavery, as Öztürk does, some might attempt at dismantling such a controversy by analogically arguing that "slave" carries a meaning in the Qur'an that is more akin to our present-day notion of "working-class person", rather than our classical definition of slave. Such analogies, argues Öztürk, are merely apologetic and by virtue of their blatant anachronism not reasonable (*makul*) nor acceptable (*makbul*)⁵⁹⁶.

The Qur'an is according to Öztürk in respect to legal concerns realist and pragmatist, rather than idealist as the Qur'an might be with matters of faith and ethics⁵⁹⁷. For example, argues Öztürk, the Qur'an was unequivocally clear about its condemnation of polytheism, and attached great urgency towards its abolition. However, in respect to the institution of slavery, the Qur'an maintained an ambivalent approach that supported its gradual abolition, while simultaneously also making use of this institution for its own practical purposes. The latter can inevitably be evidenced from the fact that slavery was tolerated as an institution, because the prospect of gaining slaves was a great incentive for some Muslims to participate in military campaigns against the Meccan polytheists. Mainly, because captives of war could be kept as personal slaves⁵⁹⁸.

To reiterate one of Öztürk's core hermeneutical principles, as insisted by the transhistorical-historical dialectics: not everything in the Qur'an is meant to be applicable (*geçerli*) and of value (*değerli*) for all times and places⁵⁹⁹. Nor, is everything part of religion (*din*) or religious (*dini*) in nature. Some judgments passed

⁵⁹⁶ Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 91.

⁵⁹⁷ Öztürk, 90.

⁵⁹⁸ Öztürk, 91.

⁵⁹⁹ Öztürk, 91.

by the Qur'an are contingent in nature, i.e. defined by a historical and contingent pragmatic value. Historical injunctions, such as those related to the physical reprimanding of women, are according to Öztürk not part of Islam's transcendent message, and therefore, do not contain virtues worthy of future repetitions: "swatting women in order to discipline, is neither religion (*din*), nor an ethico-religious virtue (*dinî-ahlaki*)."⁶⁰⁰

As for the clarification of what might be the transhistorical quality in the Qur'an's legal message, Öztürk resorts to a teleological framework. The transhistorical quality of legal judgements is understood by Öztürk to be the incentive, i.e. purpose undergirding an injunction, and not the specific, historical implementation recorded by the Qur'an. What must therefore be assimilated into the present is not the historical judgement per se but the realization of the original incentive behind the judgement.

Öztürk's teleological understanding of law is supported by his understanding of language. According to Öztürk's understanding of language, the composition of an expression is not necessarily identical to the intention preceding its utterance or writing. Rather, as Öztürk argues: "the expression (*lafiz*) is not the purpose (*maksat*) itself but an example implementation (*örnek uygulama*)."⁶⁰¹ In other words, a particular expression can be separated from its *intentio*⁶⁰². This implies that the abandonment of the Qur'an's literal instruction does not necessarily entail abandoning the purpose behind its instruction. For example, as Öztürk argues, one can separate the Qur'anic injunction "cut the hands of a thief", from its *raison d'être*: the protection of private property (*özel mulkiyet*)⁶⁰³.

⁶⁰⁰ Öztürk, 91.

⁶⁰¹ Öztürk, 94.

⁶⁰² This aspect of Öztürk's thinking, was also acutely observed by Körner from another element of Öztürk's work. Körner argued that Öztürk's bifurcation between the previously mentioned address (*hitap*) and message (*mesaj*), signified the differentiation between what the Qur'an said (*Gesagtem*) and what it actually meant (*Gemeintem*). Körner, "Modernistische Koranexegese in Der Türkei : Eine Diskussion Mit Mustafa Öztürk," 15.

⁶⁰³ Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 94.

What is important in Öztürk's thinking concerning the mediation of Qur'anic law, is not so much the earlier mentioned objective (*nesnel*) and textual (*metinsel*) reality of the judgements passed by the Qur'an, but its relevance and applicability on a social level (*sosyal ve işlevsel gerçeklik*)⁶⁰⁴. Put differently, rather than jumping through various interpretative hoops, Öztürk understand the cutting of hands, as the literal cutting of physical hands; which, is from a historical and philological standpoint the most straightforward reading. However, the objective reality concerning the meaning of the verse, does not necessarily mean that a Muslim should apply himself to the verse in question. Rather, one must measure the applicability (*işlevsellik*) of such a verse within present-day social circumstances⁶⁰⁵. In other words, one must also take into considerations the subjective aspects of those who are addressed by the Qur'an in the present.

Öztürk argues that even classical authorities such as Ibn Abbas were evaluating verses in terms of their applicability in changing circumstances and did not feel any uneasiness in accepting the historicity of the Qur'an. This is made clear by a report wherein Ibn Abbas is confronted by a group of Muslims decrying that no one is applying the command in verse 24:58. In this particular verse, preadolescent children are commanded to ask permission at certain times before entering the house. Ibn Abbas replies that this verse was revealed at a time when the majority of Muslims did not have houses with properly separated rooms or doors. As such, a child would enter upon their parent at embarrassing times. However, once people got to have houses with properly separated rooms and doors, the injunction in the verse was no longer being practiced⁶⁰⁶.

⁶⁰⁴ Öztürk, 97.

⁶⁰⁵ Öztürk, 97.

⁶⁰⁶ Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 31; Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular*, 55.

Changing circumstances will keep challenging Muslims in regards to how they apply the Qur'an's injunctions. Öztürk argues that in some cases it is even possible to find better ways wherein the earlier mentioned universal interests of the Qur'an can be mediated into the present⁶⁰⁷. To return once more to the injunction of cutting the hands of thieves, we are informed by Öztürk that one of the interests behind this verse is to correct the thief from stealing any further. Accordingly, rather than cutting hands publicly after the Friday prayer as Saudi Arabia does, Öztürk empathises more with the example of the municipality of Gaziantep (Turkey) and their wellness programs, which have helped liberate glue-sniffing (*tinerci*) youth from a continuing life of larceny⁶⁰⁸. In other words, with modern resources, perennial concerns of the Qur'an can be honoured in new and different ways by Muslims in the present that might be better⁶⁰⁹ than their historical implementations.

Öztürk understands that such a teleological take on the Qur'an's legal content, will open a pathway for a myriad of differing understandings concerning what the real interests behind certain verses might be. It is quite possible, argues Öztürk, that some interpreters might rise up and claim that a verse that commands women to veil, was not a categorical imperative but a piece of advice (*tavsiye*). Such an understanding would be quite atypical to conventional readings of such verses. However, despite the controversial nature of some disagreements, Öztürk only hopes that such interpretations are realist (*gerçekçi*), have proper bases (*temellendirmis*) and supporting principles (*ilkeli olmak*), and are more than mere rhetoric (*retoriksel*) alone⁶¹⁰. In other words, different interpretations are quite natural but are only respectable if they fulfil the aforementioned conditions.

⁶⁰⁷ Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 97.

⁶⁰⁸ Öztürk, 97.

⁶⁰⁹ Öztürk uses the phrase "daha güzel" (lit. 'more beautiful'), which in this context should be translated as "better" or "more appropriate". Öztürk, 97.

⁶¹⁰ Öztürk, 98.

Responding to criticism

The previous section has demonstrated that an important element of Öztürk is the desire to identify God's intent behind verses. In other words, to wonder, and thereby psychologize, as to what God's wishes are behind His revelation. Öztürk is aware of the potential critique against the psychologisation of the Qur'an, and has responded to this issue in a variety of ways.

Öztürk recounts that the issue of psychologisation had already been debated in the Turkish context in respect to the question as to whether the hermeneutical models proposed by Romantic thinkers such as Dilthey could be helpful in the context of understanding the Qur'an⁶¹¹. Critics dismissed the appropriation of Diltheyian concepts such as re-experiencing (*Nacherleben*), on account of the ontological rift (*ontolojik farklılık*) between humans and God⁶¹². In response, Öztürk argues that one does not empathise directly with God's essence (*zat*) but with the spirit of revelation (*vahyin ruhuyla*)⁶¹³. In other words, one emphasizes with God's intention (*maksat*) informed from and directed towards the experiences of a specific historical audience. Accordingly, while it is true that God's essence transcends human understanding, we must not ignore the fact that His revelation has become relatable by being revealed within a contingent history in a format directed towards human understanding (*beşeri düzleme*)⁶¹⁴.

The revelation history of the Qur'an further testifies to this possibility of empathising with revelation. Öztürk argues that there are diverse traditional accounts documenting how certain opinions voiced by the Prophet's companions, were subsequently reiterated, sometimes verbatim, by the revelation of the Qur'an⁶¹⁵. In other words, there is a clear historical precedent of Muslims being

⁶¹¹ Öztürk, *Kur'an'ı Kendi Tarihinde Okumak : Tefsirde Anakronizme Ret Yazıları*, 37.

⁶¹² Öztürk, 37.

⁶¹³ Öztürk, 38.

⁶¹⁴ Öztürk, 38.

⁶¹⁵ Öztürk, 38.

able to direct their intentions towards problems that are in accordance with God's will, even in the absence of revelation⁶¹⁶. In the case of the latter, Öztürk argues that you only need to inspect certain traditions concerning the correspondence between the opinion of 'Umar and the revelation of the Qur'an.

This concept of 'Umar's congruence (*muvaafakat-i Ömer*), is based on a recurrent historical occurrence wherein 'Umar had voiced an opinion on a matter that subsequently was reiterated, and thereby vindicated, by revelation. Among the notable examples related by Öztürk is 'Umar's suggestion to establish the *Maqām Ibrahim* (Station of Abraham) as a place of worship, which led to the revelation of "and take ye the station of Abraham as a place of prayer"⁶¹⁷. Another example is 'Umar's advice to the Prophet to make his wives speak to strangers from behind a veil, since his house is "visited by good people as well as people with ill-intent."⁶¹⁸ Accordingly, in congruence with 'Umar's wishes, the following verse was revealed: "And when ye ask (his ladies) for anything ye want, ask them from before a screen: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs."⁶¹⁹ Finally, when some of the Prophet's wives were creating domestic unrest on account of their envy, 'Umar had advised them the same words that were later reiterated in this verse: "It may be, if he divorced you (all), that Allah will give him in exchange consorts better than you"⁶²⁰.

One of the more pertinent consequences of these historical congruences between revelation and human ideas, such as those documented about 'Umar, lies in the prospective of resolving issues in the absence of revelation. According to Öztürk, companions were able to think of solutions that were animated by an awareness (*bilinç*) and sensibility (*duyarlık*) particular to being a Muslim, which were subsequently confirmed (*teyit*) by revelation, to such an extent, that some verses

⁶¹⁶ Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 265.

⁶¹⁷ Qur'an 2:125; Öztürk, 237.

⁶¹⁸ Öztürk, 237.

⁶¹⁹ Qur'an 33:53

⁶²⁰ Qur'an 66:5

were revealed with a verbatim accordance with what was spoken by a companion⁶²¹. As such, it is quite possible for a Muslim to envision solutions to certain problems that are in congruence with God's will (*ilahi irade*), even in the absence of text (*nas*)⁶²². However, Öztürk does argue that such solutions will only work if they are offered by a Muslim who is rational, scrupulous (*vicdan sahibi*), genuinely faithful, and in full submission (*teslimiyet*) to God⁶²³.

The ethics of interpretative claims

As the last sentence of the previous section demonstrates, Öztürk's hermeneutics has more to offer than mere methodological concerns alone. There are also distinct ethical considerations to be discovered in Öztürk's work. The importance accorded by Öztürk towards such ethical considerations, should not be underestimated: "before [there is any speak of] theology of Islamic sciences, grace (*nezaket*), delicacy (*zarafet*), etiquette (*görgü*), or more succinctly, civilised manners (*medenilik*) must be attained."⁶²⁴ In the following section, the ethical side of Öztürk's hermeneutics will be further elaborated, because it also has an important bearing on the status of subjective understanding in interpretation. For, as we shall soon discover, subjectivity in interpretation is affirmed by Öztürk on account of its ability to warrant tolerance, authenticity and humility in interpretation.

Given Öztürk's decades long academic presence in the discipline of *tafsir*, it is no surprise that one of the sources of Öztürk's ethical concerns, is the keen awareness and understanding of interpretative differences. Such an understanding is but an inevitable outcome of a research career that has investigated differing traditional and sectarian groups and their Qur'an exegesis, ranging from the Shī'a, the

⁶²¹ Öztürk, *Kur'an Tefsir ve Usul Üzerine & Problemler Tespitler*, 264–65.

⁶²² Öztürk, 265.

⁶²³ Öztürk, 265.

⁶²⁴ Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular*, 93.

Mu'tazilīs, the mystics, to the more dominant Sunni schools of the Māturīdīs and Ash'arīs.

Öztürk points towards the Qur'an's canonization as a key cause for interpretative differences between diverse groups. As a canonized text, the Qur'an was no longer a recitation that originated from the conversation between man and God; rather, the Qur'an had become separated from its original meaning-circumscribing context, opening up a variety of different interpretations. Consequently, by becoming open to a variety of meanings, the Qur'an also opened up the possibility for meanings that ratify sectarian interests, rather than challenge them.

The Prophet had argued that disagreements in his community are a sign of mercy. However, while keenly aware of such prophetic wisdom, Öztürk argues that the Mu'tazilīs never extended this mercy to the Ash'arīs, and neither did the Ash'arīs extend this mercy to the Mu'tazilīs⁶²⁵. On the contrary, Ash'arī dogmatists like Abū Manṣūr al-Baghdādī (d. 1037) wrote detailed heresiographies that would use denigrating language describing other groups that did not share similar interpretations⁶²⁶. The Other would always be thought of as being astray and following mere fancy. As such, to merely address the problem of exegetical strife from a standpoint of methodology is naïve: "to argue that all these problems [i.e. interpretative disagreements] stem from mere divergence in method and scientific understanding, is pure naivety. It is my contestation, that the real matter revolves around consideration (*iz'an*), fairness (*insaf*), and character (*ahlak*)."⁶²⁷

The solution to such a derogatory attitude towards difference, starts according to Öztürk by giving up claims of having an exclusive lease on truth. In this respect Öztürk speaks of refraining from a *tek hakikatçı dil* (a language of being exclusively

⁶²⁵ Öztürk, 90.

⁶²⁶ Öztürk, 93.

⁶²⁷ Öztürk, 91.

right) and *hakikatı temellük etmek* (claiming exclusive ownership of truth)⁶²⁸.

Rather, as Öztürk argues: “truth is not something humans possess. Humans can only pursue truth and perhaps grasp one of its aspects (*bir yönüyle kavrayabilir*).”⁶²⁹

Accordingly, it is imperative to be humbler and more modest in one’s interpretative claims (*haddini bilmek*). Which Öztürk decries as being absent in the interpretative landscape since many are using an absolutist language similar to God. However, according to Öztürk, such a mode of speaking about the Qur’an, is a sign of impudence (*kustahlık*) and arrogance (*kibirlik*)⁶³⁰, that will in the long run neither benefit humans at large, nor Muslims in particular⁶³¹.

One simply cannot resort to absolutist claims (*mutlak nesnelci*) without being naive according to Öztürk⁶³². Naive, because no interpretation is free of any subjectivity⁶³³. Interpretation is influenced by a person’s capacity to understand, their ideological inclinations, emotional state, culture, and practical experience; which, inevitably, differs from person to person. Even members of the same religion, or the same denomination for that matter, will read for this reason a religious text differently⁶³⁴.

Öztürk argues that absolutist claims about the Qur’an are further complicated by virtue of two problems: historical distance and the manipulation and disinformation (*dezenformasyon*) by the Qur’an’s interpretation tradition. As repeatedly indicated by Öztürk, our understanding of the Qur’an has become complicated on account of a degree of alienation (*yabancılık*) developed between the Qur’an’s world of language (*dil*), meaning (*anlam*), and terminology (*kavram*) and our present-day world⁶³⁵. A complication, that is only further aggravated by a tradition of inherited

⁶²⁸ Öztürk, 93; Öztürk, “Kur’an Vahyinin Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanması,” 35.

⁶²⁹ Öztürk, *Kur’an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular*, 93.

⁶³⁰ Öztürk, 91.

⁶³¹ Öztürk, 93.

⁶³² Öztürk, 92.

⁶³³ Öztürk, 92.

⁶³⁴ Öztürk, 92; Öztürk, “Kur’an Vahyinin Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanması,” 39.

⁶³⁵ Öztürk, *Kur’an ve Tarihsellik Üzerine: Çerçeve Yazılar, Örnek Konular*, 92.

explanations full of manipulation and disinformation caused by fifteen centuries of political (*siyasi*), sectarian (*mezhebi*), and doctrinal (*itikadi*) strife.

To conclude, in Öztürk's hermeneutics objective interpretative principles and subjective conscientiousness are both part and parcel to the interpretative process. Objectivity is something one ought to pursue but can never absolutely claim. Especially present-day readers cannot exercise such a confidence in their truth claims as their understanding is from the very onset perturbed by historical distance to the text and a distorted interpretative tradition. Accordingly, an interpreter must always exercise a degree of subjective humility concerning their truth claims concerning the Qur'an and remain open to the fact that they might be wrong about their understanding. As Öztürk states, "When we are able to turn to and criticize ourselves, we will learn to be less polarizing in respect to understanding the Qur'an, to be more acquainted with an understanding that draws closer, and to be at the very least tolerant of those who think differently."⁶³⁶

Guarding the lines between *tahrīf* and *ta'wīl*

Öztürk's hermeneutics maintains a constructive view toward the pursuit of objectivity and the presence of subjectivity when interpreting the Qur'an. Subjectivity and objectivity both have their own important role to play in the process of interpreting the Qur'an. However, with subjectivity and objectivity having their own particular role, it also means that each in turn has their own specific limits. In this final section, these limitations will be further explored as they provide concluding insights into the dynamics between subjectivity and objectivity in Öztürk's thought.

The historicity of the Qur'an averts the over-universalizing of its pertinence. For starters, because the Qur'an's message was initially directed towards a specific

⁶³⁶ Öztürk, 93.

historical audience. Accordingly, there is by default an objective meaning to the Qur'an, which is embedded in God's original intent specifically catered towards the understanding of the Qur'an's direct audience. However, this historicization consequently implies that one level⁶³⁷ of the Qur'an's significance is off limits to the pull and effects of our subjective experiences. Otherwise, we will run the risk of having the Qur'an signify what we personally think or wish it does in the present, rather than what it signified historically by God's design⁶³⁸.

In a previous section Öztürk made it clear that *tafsir* is the science that unearths the historical and objective meaning of the Qur'an, whereas *ta'wil* pertains itself to renewing the significance of the Qur'an for the present based on the information provided by *tafsir*. With this bifurcation in mind, we can by default conclude that in Öztürk's view *tafsir* can never become directed by subjective deliberations⁶³⁹. However, less straightforward, is Öztürk's claim that *ta'wil*, despite being related to the subjective elements of interpretation, has to in fact rely on logical, linguistic, and historical deliberations. In other words, although *tafsir* should never be mixed with subjectivity, *ta'wil*, while considerate of subjectivity, should never be based on subjectivity alone.

Öztürk's primary reason for guarding *ta'wil*, comes from a desire to protect *ta'wil* from becoming *tahrif* (distortion). *Ta'wil* without reference to historical, logical, or linguistic considerations, will lose scientific dependability. Accordingly, Öztürk claims that by having no subject independent references wherewith interpretations can be examined, the lines between interpreting (*ta'wil*) or twisting (*tahrif*) the meaning of the Qur'an become blurred (*muğlaklaşmaktadır*), or even worse, lost⁶⁴⁰. Since interpretations, especially when they are related to God's wishes, become

⁶³⁷ To recall, there are two levels of significance in Öztürk's hermeneutics: historical and contemporary.

⁶³⁸ Öztürk, "Kur'an Vahyinin Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanması," 33.

⁶³⁹ Öztürk, 33.

⁶⁴⁰ Öztürk, 39.

normative, it is important that we are able to warrant their status as a *ta'wīl* and protect them from being a *taḥrīf* of the text.

Öztürk accords a different status to purely subjective intuitions of the Qur'an's meanings. Accordingly, just because certain interpretations are not *tafsīr* or *ta'wīl* in the proper sense, it does not mean that they are by default disavowed by Öztürk. As Öztürk elaborates, a believer might do his ablution, segregate himself, and read the Qur'an with true deliberation. Subsequently, various new and inspiring meanings might dawn in that person's heart that were hitherto not known. However, as Öztürk argues "we have no right to regard canonize (*kanonikleştirme*) certain meanings and associations that appear in our minds and hearts drawn from our personal relationship with the Qur'an."⁶⁴¹ In other words, one cannot regard intuitive meanings as canonical⁶⁴² if they are not born from reflections based on principles that can be verified scientifically but are merely drawn from pre-predicative intuition, such as the mystical experience⁶⁴³. Rather, such meanings, should be considered as apocryphal (*Apokrif*). The latter comprises all kinds of meaning according to Öztürk that escape the linguistic, historical and logical data whereupon *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* relies. Meanings that are ultimately not binding (*bağlayıcı*) nor formally accepted (*gayr-i resmi*)⁶⁴⁴

Concluding remarks

Öztürk's hermeneutics is a strong case in point, as to how the understanding of subjectivity in interpretation, simultaneously defines the contours of the surplus of meaning. First of all, binary distinctions such as historical-transhistorical, essence-form, address-message, whereupon Öztürk's hermeneutics heavily relies, are

⁶⁴¹ Öztürk, *İlahi Hitabın Tefsiri* - 1, 1:49.

⁶⁴² Canonical means in this context objectively verifiable interpretations that are formally accepted (*resmi*) as legitimate interpretations of God's will. Moreover, when they have legal content, they can become potentially binding (*bağlayıcı*) on the larger Muslim community.

⁶⁴³ Öztürk, *İlahi Hitabın Tefsiri* - 1, 1:48.

⁶⁴⁴ Öztürk, 1:49.

inevitably superimposed on the Qur'an's text, since neither of those terms is present in the text itself. Accordingly, a historicizing subject, cannot escape from superimposing, and thereby forcing, a surplus of meaning not present in the linguistic materiality of the text. For example, rather than straightforwardly reading a Qur'anic injunction as "cut off the hands of a thief", one will inevitably read this injunction as follows "cut off the hands, [since you do not have better resources to protect property and correct thieves in present-day 7th century Arabia]", or "[I, God, command you to] cut off the hands of a thief [tentatively]".

With these binary distinctions between historical-transhistorical Öztürk also applies a strict perimeter around the Qur'an's appeal. First of all, by arguing that the Qur'an's primary address was reserved to its initial, historical audience. Accordingly, even if the Qur'an speaks with generic pronouns (e.g. "you" and "believers"), the contemporary reader may not indiscriminately relate this address to their own self. Rather, for the modern reader, a proper meaning of the Qur'an is in Öztürk's framework only gained through an interpretative detour. In other words, by (1) relinquishing the claim that one is directly addressed by the Qur'an, (2) abstracting the universal, transhistorical message of the Qur'an from its historical, contingent application, and finally (3) by performing a new mediation between the present and the universal message of the Qur'an.

This commitment towards recognizing the dialectics between the historical and transhistorical aspects of the Qur'an, reaffirms the innate kinship between the ideas of Öztürk and Fazlur Rahman. In some instances, Öztürk is rehashing and paraphrasing Rahman in Turkish. For example, Rahman argued:

"We see, then, that the Qur'an and the genesis of the Islamic community occurred in the light of history and against a social- historical background. The Qur'an is a response to that situation, and for the most part it consists of moral, religious, and social pronouncements that respond to specific problems confronted in concrete historical situations."⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴⁵ Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 5.

Whereas Öztürk stated the following: “the transhistorical messages of the Qur’an have been presented in forms that express the situation at hand.”⁶⁴⁶

If similar ideas can be found in the works of Rahman or the Ankara School members, it may be wondered what the true novelty of Öztürk’s thinking is? Körner has framed Öztürk’s contribution in terms of radicality. In other words, by arguing that Öztürk’s works are similar to that of Turkish Qur’an historicist Omer Özsoy but more radical⁶⁴⁷. Unfortunately, Körner does not explain to what degree Öztürk is more radical in his claims than Özsoy. I can only suspect that this relates to Öztürk’s seemingly more incisive statements, such as that some verses of the Qur’an did not even contain a higher ethical message in their own particular context but were only meant to give contingent answers to the Prophet’s detractors. Accordingly, Öztürk is almost suggesting that some verses were just “stopgap verses”, which inevitably raises a few theological controversies⁶⁴⁸. I have yet to discover such incisive statements in the works of Özsoy, or other Ankara School theologians for that matter.

Besides its incisive nature, I argue that Öztürk’s contribution to the historicist paradigm also lies in the range and creativity of his arguments. There is a great deal of overlap in the ideas of Öztürk and Rahman, as both authors argue for a hermeneutical method in which the universal values of the Qur’an are distilled and mediated anew with the present. However, while Rahman and Öztürk might share a similar hermeneutical outlook, they do not necessarily use the same references to the Qur’an, the Prophet, or the overall Islamic tradition in order to support this outlook. Accordingly, what makes Öztürk’s plea for a historical-critical

⁶⁴⁶ Öztürk, *Kur’an ve Tefsir Kültürümüz*, 21.

⁶⁴⁷ “Öztürk radikalisiert Özsoys Positionen” (Öztürk radicalizes the positions of Özsoy). Körner, “Modernistische Koranexegese in Der Türkei : Eine Diskussion Mit Mustafa Öztürk,” 13.

⁶⁴⁸ For example, does it befit God to put in His last will to humankind disposable information?

interpretation of the Qur'an distinctly unique, is his particular creative reading and deconstruction of the Islamic tradition.

Öztürk's deconstruction of tradition and his resistance to regard tradition as untouchable and sacrosanct, further imbue his work with a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that is best illustrated by Öztürk's earlier discussed evaluation of intra-Muslim interpretative differences. All three writers of this dissertation, as it should be clear by now, address the status of personal faith in understanding. Cündioğlu sees faith in interpretation as a dead-end, while both Alpyağıl and Öztürk affirm its constructive value for understanding. While Cündioğlu sees the divergence of interpretation among the Muslim sects as an evidence for why faith has little to do with guiding understanding, Öztürk, on the other hand, argued for its necessity together with other subjective experiences such as conscientiousness. It seems that both authors are basing their arguments on another hidden premise, which in the case of Cündioğlu must be the conviction that all theological sects, despite their differences, have authentic faith involved in their interpretation; while, Öztürk, as we must inversely conclude, seems to believe that authentic faith was not involved. For, as Öztürk implies, difference in understanding would not have come to be, as far as the disingenuous interpretations go, if they stemmed from genuine faith and submission to God.

This hermeneutics of suspicion creates both a fundamental interpretative humility and openness within Öztürk's thinking. Truth, as we saw earlier, can only be aspired to, and never be claimed by one interpretative party alone. This openness is not merely advocated on a theoretical level by Öztürk, but it is also practiced in his recently published *tafsīr*. Öztürk stated in this work that he will seek to mediate the secondary, present meaning of the Qur'an not exclusively in reference to the Islamic tradition. On the contrary, Öztürk will also venture out and garner insights from other traditions of faith and thinking. As Öztürk recounts: "In interpretations concerning words and concepts such as faith, the problem of evil, and Satan, the

views of Western thinkers have also been given a place. Accordingly, the utilization of humankind's general accumulation [of wisdom] has been considered as beneficial, rather than harmful."⁶⁴⁹ For, as Öztürk further argues, while humans might partake in different religions and civilizations, their fundamental interests (*meraklar*) and big questions (*büyük sorular*) remain a shared constant (*benzer mahiyettedir*)⁶⁵⁰.

⁶⁴⁹ Öztürk, *İlahi Hitabın Tefsiri* - 1, 1:65.

⁶⁵⁰ Öztürk, 1:65.

Truth, Subjectivity, and Method: A Comparative Analysis of The Theories of Alpyağıl, Cündioğlu, and Öztürk

Introduction

In the very first chapter a case was made for a definition of hermeneutics that would be better suited to the study of contemporary Turkish discourse on hermeneutics. Accordingly, an appeal was made to define hermeneutics not with some of its other current descriptions such as the rules of interpretation or interpretation of texts. Rather, a definition was proposed that in retrospect can be rephrased as Di Cesare eloquently puts it: “Hermeneutics strives for nothing other than to *understand understanding*”⁶⁵¹. To put it in the technical terms expounded in the first chapter, hermeneutics is a type of contemplation on the operations and conditions in which things become intelligible. Hermeneutics is in this sense not something that particularly belongs to a specific culture or history as it is often imagined. The question as to how understanding is affected or works, is inevitably as old as the cross-cultural human capacity to cognize. However, without also answering the question as to what the materiality of hermeneutics is, there is still no possible way to study hermeneutics. Yet again, a case was made in contrast to some popular conceptions to not equate the material aspects of hermeneutics with interpretation rules, method, or (theoretical) system. Rather, it was argued that the most elementary presence of hermeneutics could be discovered in, and thus, most productively studied at its lowest threshold from, a statement.

Qur’an hermeneutics is by extension related to this general sense of hermeneutics but only derivatively and more restrictively. The term, as I have come to define it, is in one respect a proper noun, since it has its own share of independence and

⁶⁵¹ Donatella Di Cesare, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, trans. Niall Keane (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 37–38.

unique nature, but the term 'Qur'an' in Qur'an hermeneutics simultaneously functions as a typical qualifier that further characterizes the earlier mentioned understanding of hermeneutics. As such, Qur'an hermeneutics pertains to statements that proceed from reflections on the conditions and operations as to how *the particular meanings of the Qur'an* become intelligible. Qur'an hermeneutics is on account of this general definition not by default, as some might claim, a mere translation of a traditional concept or literary tradition within the Islamic sciences (e.g. *tafsīr*).

The difference between statements belonging to hermeneutics or Qur'an hermeneutics, can be further clarified with these examples. An author might inquire into how humans understand at all, and state that all understanding is linguistic. Accordingly, while the circumstance and variables wherein understanding might be practiced differ, such as in daily conversation or when reading an exciting text (the Qur'an included), one could argue that there is still no denying that in each of these instances understanding is mediated through and actualised within language. These sorts of hermeneutical statements advance our knowledge more broadly and generally in respect to the problem of understanding. Thus, we can define these kinds of statements as general hermeneutics. However, when an author discusses what is theoretically involved in specifically understanding the Qur'an, they are usually only advancing our knowledge of understanding the Qur'an, and not so much the understanding of other media. These statements, on the other hand, should be regarded as a type of regional hermeneutics⁶⁵². For example, any theory that deals with the question of how to understand the enigmatic letters that precede certain chapters of the Qur'an, namely 'the disjointed letters' (*al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'a*), is inevitably only solving a problem of understanding that is mainly relevant in the case of the Qur'an, and cannot be directly transposed unto a theory related to the understanding of other media and objects.

⁶⁵² Because the scope of the hermeneutical problem is regional, that is restricted to a specific object such as the Qur'an.

The Turkish authors in the preceding chapters have been shown to practice both types of general and regional hermeneutics in their works. Accordingly, we discovered that they venture back and forth between the two types of statements, having their general accounts on understanding inform their more specific take on understanding the Qur'an. For example, Cündioğlu first inquiries into how meaning is at all conveyed and what the conditions are for conveying meaning. Cündioğlu claimed that in communication one cannot concurrently intend everything, without failing to intend anything at all. Thus, the conveyance of meaning assumes a prior delimited intention, and therefore, the need to acknowledge that there is always a particular intention belonging to an utterance. In other words, the meaning of utterances is governed by an objectively discernible intention. Since, the Qur'an also conveys meanings through utterances, it means that the Qur'an also contains objectively discernible meanings that are uncovered by retrieving the authorial intent.

In the preceding chapters, various general and regional hermeneutical statements made by contemporary Turkish thinkers were analysed that pertained to the problem of subjectivity versus objectivity in interpreting the Qur'an. Each author's statements were introduced, contextualized, and studied in their own right. However, a substantial cross-examination is still missing for us to have a better understanding of what the central themes and problems are in contemporary theories of Qur'an hermeneutics within the Turkish context. Accordingly, in this chapter I will undertake the task of comparatively analysing the statements made by Cündioğlu, Alpyağıl, and Öztürk concerning the status of subjectivity and objectivity within the context of interpreting the Qur'an.

I will conduct this cross-examination in accordance with the following question: what are the similarities and differences between the various subjective and objective conditions that are requisite for accessing the truth of the Qur'an

according to Alpyağıl, Öztürk, and Cündioğlu? The answer to this question will serve as the basis for the next chapter. Since, in the next chapter the implications of the aforementioned conditions pertaining to subjectivity and objectivity will come to their logical end, namely understanding what the status of new and different readings of the Qur'an are.

The following example will further illustrate the teleological relationship between the discussions in this chapter and the next. In the previous chapters, we discovered that Cündioğlu argued that the truth, and hence, the meaning of the Qur'an, is God's original solitary intention. Solitary, since Cündioğlu argued against the theoretical impossibilities of concurrent meanings being intended by God. The objective condition to access this truth, however, is by reconstructing God's authorial intent within the historical-linguistic horizon of the Qur'an's initial revelation. Accordingly, since there is only one meaning intended by God, this implies that new and different readings of the Qur'an are by default qualified in reference to how adequately they disclose this meaning vis-à-vis the already existent exegetical tradition. Moreover, any present and future exegete that comes with a new understanding of the Qur'an, has to disqualify past readings of the Qur'an and make a rational case for why their own reading corresponds instead with God's intent. In other words, new readings can only be meaningful if old readings are wrong: they cannot, since concurrency of meaning is excluded, be additional or deeper truths disclosed by God.

Nevertheless, to further explore the main question of this chapter as well as demonstrate the philosophical stakes involved, I will beforehand rely on various insights gathered from Foucault's historiographical discussion on subjectivity and truth. There are a few reasons for this choice. The most important of which, is to establish the context and technical terminology that will help us to better organize and navigate the desperate ideas discussed in previous chapters. In other words, it is not to present a dedicated study of Foucault but a heuristic frame that provides

us a deeper philosophical context and reflection on what is at stake in the ideas of the Turkish thinkers. Moreover, it will also demonstrate the philosophical breath of the discussions of the Turkish thinkers as they are clearly intersecting with discussions held in contemporary philosophy.

In the following sections I will first delineate some key-insights from Foucault followed by their pertinence to the discussion held by the Turkish thinkers. Afterwards, guided by these insights, I will comparatively examine the ideas by the Turkish thinkers in two major sections. The first section will focus on a comparative analysis of the ideas pertaining to the subjective conditions and limitations requisite to access the truth of the Qur'an, and the second section will focus on objective conditions and limitations requisite to access the truth of the Qur'an.

Truth and spirituality

In the latter part of his career, Foucault had given a course on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. The main goal of this lecture was to answer the following question: "In what historical form do the relations between the 'subject' and 'truth', elements that do not usually fall within the historian's practice or analysis, take shape in the West?"⁶⁵³ Foucault would then approach this question by exploring the historical significance of the classical Greek notion of *epimeleia heautou*, which he translates in a variety of manners as care of oneself, attending to oneself, and being concerned about oneself. While current in Greek thought, according to Foucault the notion of *epimeleia heautou* had not received any importance in the historiography of philosophy⁶⁵⁴. This was mainly due to the fact that the history of philosophy, more broadly the history of Western thought, had argued that "the founding expression of the question of the relations between the subject and truth", is in

⁶⁵³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, n.d.), 2.

⁶⁵⁴ Foucault, 2.

actuality the famous Delphic prescription *gnōthi seauton* (know yourself)⁶⁵⁵. In other words, not care of oneself but knowledge of oneself gives us access to truth. Hence, what is ultimately at stake between these two precepts in Foucault's forthcoming discussion, are two different paradigms wherewith we can establish the relationship between the subject and truth. The first, related to the notion of *epimeleia heautou*, and epitomized by the discipline of spirituality, emphasizes that truth is accessed by exercising certain actions on the self that change, purify, transform, and transfigure oneself⁶⁵⁶. The second, related to the *gnōthi seauton*, and epitomized by philosophy, argues that truth is accessed by the subject by virtue of knowledge (*connaissance*) alone⁶⁵⁷. Both of these paradigms that decide how truth is guaranteed, will eventually also surface in the ideas of the Turkish thinkers. However, that aspect of their discussion will be elucidated in a later section.

As irrelevant as it might be to present historiographies of philosophy, from the fifth century B.C. to the fifth century A.D., *epimeleia heautou* was an important precept of classical thinking. Its history, as Foucault recounts, extended from "Socrates stopping young people to tell them to take care of themselves up to Christian ascetism making the ascetic life begin the care of oneself."⁶⁵⁸ It was a notion that did not only describe one of the fundamental philosophical attitudes of ancient Greek culture but also that of the proceeding Hellenistic and Roman cultures⁶⁵⁹.

During this period of history, the question of "how to have access to the truth" and the practice of spirituality (of the necessary transformations in the very being of the subject which will allow access to the truth), were never separate⁶⁶⁰. Rather, the *epimeleia heautou* designated precisely "the set of conditions of spirituality, the set of transformations of the self, that are the necessary conditions for having access to

⁶⁵⁵ Foucault, 3.

⁶⁵⁶ Foucault, 11.

⁶⁵⁷ Foucault, 15.

⁶⁵⁸ Foucault, 10.

⁶⁵⁹ Foucault, 8.

⁶⁶⁰ Foucault, 16–17.

the truth.”⁶⁶¹ For example, in classical Greek thinking, there are instances in which truth is accessed only by performing purification rites. As Foucault recounts, one cannot hear what the oracle had to say without first performing a sacrifice that purified the self⁶⁶². Similarly, the Pythagoreans believed that contact with the divine world, and consequently the “world of truth”, could be procured through dreams⁶⁶³. However, the condition for this procurement was the purification of the soul by applying certain techniques such as listening to music, inhaling perfumes, and examining one’s conscious⁶⁶⁴.

A more elaborate example of the close relationship between self-knowledge and self-care, and spirituality and truth for that matter, can be discovered within a dialogue between Socrates and Alcibiades⁶⁶⁵. As Foucault retells this dialogue, Alcibiades enjoyed a privileged status of wealth, power, and attractiveness in Athens. However, Alcibiades was still unsatisfied and set his aims higher, namely the transformation of his statutory privilege and pre-eminence into political action, and hence, into the effective government of others⁶⁶⁶. As expected of Socrates, Alcibiades’ ambition was questioned on a variety of fronts. After assessing that a city is well governed when harmony reigns amongst its citizens, Alcibiades was asked by Socrates what this harmony constitutes of⁶⁶⁷. Having no ready-made answer, Alcibiades crumbled and accepted that he had “lived for a long time in a state of shameful ignorance without being aware of it.”⁶⁶⁸ Socrates’ cross-examination lead Alcibiades to conclude that “he does not know the object of good government, and that is why he must pay attention to himself.”⁶⁶⁹ He must first remedy not only his ignorance of the subject matter but also that he does not know

⁶⁶¹ Foucault, 17.

⁶⁶² Foucault, 47.

⁶⁶³ Foucault, 48.

⁶⁶⁴ Foucault, 48.

⁶⁶⁵ The source of this dialogue is Plato’s *Alcibiades*.

⁶⁶⁶ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 33.

⁶⁶⁷ Foucault, 35.

⁶⁶⁸ Foucault, 36.

⁶⁶⁹ Foucault, 38.

that he is ignorant of the subject itself. He must thus take care of himself before governing others. Yet, and this is where the spiritual nature of Socrates' advice becomes over evident, to take care of oneself, one must know oneself; to know oneself one looks not directly at oneself but at oneself in an element that is the most same as the self. In the case of Socrates, this element that resembles humans the most, is the divine element that is the source of thought and knowledge⁶⁷⁰. Consequently, by opening unto the knowledge of the divine, the soul will be endowed with *sōphrosunē* (wisdom) and taught to distinguish good from evil and truth from falsehood. Moreover, by having become wiser, "the soul will be able to conduct itself properly, and being able to conduct itself properly it will [finally] be able to govern the city."⁶⁷¹

After Antiquity, however, the reverence and close relationship between the care of oneself and the knowledge of oneself becomes slowly disintegrated to the point that it becomes irrelevant as a condition to access truth. In the words of Foucault, "Now, leaping over several centuries, we can say that we enter the modern age (I mean, the history of truth enters its modern period) when it is assumed that what gives access to the truth, the condition for the subject's access to the truth, is knowledge (*connaissance*) and knowledge alone."⁶⁷² The question as to what conditions one must impose on their being as a subject so as to have access to the truth, becomes inconsequential. As a result, anyone who satisfies a set of formal, methodological conditions is able to reach truth without undergoing any fundamental transformation⁶⁷³.

⁶⁷⁰ We can interpret this also as God given Socrates' statement: "It is God, then, that we must look at: for whoever wishes to judge the quality of the soul, he is the best mirror of human things themselves, we can best see and know ourselves in him." However, Foucault does not want to overemphasize this explicit relationship to God, since there is still ambiguity surrounding whether Socrates had truly said this or whether this statement was later interjected by the Platonist-Christian tradition. Foucault, 70.

⁶⁷¹ Foucault, 71.

⁶⁷² Foucault, 17.

⁶⁷³ Kerem Eksen, "Truth in Practice: Foucault's Procedural Approach to Spirituality," in *The Philosophy of Spirituality: Analytic, Continental and Multicultural Approaches to a New Field of Philosophy*, ed. Heather Salazar and Roderick Nicholls (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2019), 280.

An important cause for Foucault that spurred this historical change was the “Cartesian moment”. By disqualifying the care of the self and requalifying the knowledge of oneself, René Descartes (d. 1650) dissociated a philosophy of knowledge from a spirituality of the transformation of the subject's very being⁶⁷⁴. To recall this moment, Descartes, as documented by the *Meditations*, ventured on a critical reconsideration of his previously held opinions: “And thus I realized that once in my life I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences.”⁶⁷⁵ By employing methodical doubt, Descartes started to tear down everything he previously held to be true. However, in this process, Descartes discovered one fact he could not unmake: the self-evident fact that he - as a subject - was indeed cognizant, and hence, existing (*cogito ergo sum*). Having found this Archimedean point, Descartes proceeded rebuilding his knowledge of God, mathematics, and the physical world⁶⁷⁶. However, as Foucault argued, the outcome of the Cartesian moment also heralded a new twist on the previously discussed precept of knowing thyself by disconnecting its knowledge from its classical requirement of taking care of oneself. For, what secured indubitable knowledge was no longer regarded to be the spiritual transformation of the subject but the self-evident nature of existing and being cognizant.

The divorce of epistemology from spirituality, does not necessarily mean that there are no longer conditions for accessing truth. On the contrary, a new set of conditions come to exist that “only concern the individual in his concrete existence, and not the structure of the subject as such.”⁶⁷⁷ Nonspiritual epistemologies can indeed stipulate internal and external conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to

⁶⁷⁴ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, xxiv.

⁶⁷⁵ Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 59.

⁶⁷⁶ Brad Elliott Stone, “Subjectivity and Truth,” in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Diana Taylor (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2011), 145.

⁶⁷⁷ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 18.

access truth⁶⁷⁸. For example, nonspiritual epistemologies can stipulate that an internal condition of procuring truth is by obliging with a formal rule of method. Moreover, in regard to an external condition, they can stipulate certain cultural conditions such as having an education or the need to operate within a certain scientific consensus⁶⁷⁹. Nevertheless, in each of these instances the conditions stipulated are either intrinsic or extrinsic to the act of knowledge. In other words, in contrast to requirements such as purification rites or religious conversion, neither of these conditions concern the subject “in his being”⁶⁸⁰.

Epistemologies that concern only the individual in his concrete existence and not the structure of the subject as such, have two markedly different significances. Spiritual epistemologies have a “rebound effect” according to Foucault. Truth procured through such epistemologies will “complete in the subject” and serve as a crowning for the work or sacrifice paid in order to receive this truth⁶⁸¹. Nonspiritual epistemologies, however, only result in the indefinite development of knowledge⁶⁸². They do not rebound on the subject by transforming, that is by enlightening or fulfilling, the subject. On the contrary, nonspiritual epistemologies ensure that “knowledge will simply open out onto the indefinite dimension of progress, the end of which is unknown and the advantage of which will only ever be realized in the course of history by the institutional accumulation of bodies of knowledge”⁶⁸³.

After having researched the Turkish thinkers in the previous chapters, I have come to the conclusion that the Foucauldian question of what conditions I must impose on my being as a subject so as to have access to the truth, has also been an important concern in the works of the Turkish thinkers. The Turkish thinkers have

⁶⁷⁸ Foucault, 18.

⁶⁷⁹ Foucault, 18.

⁶⁸⁰ Foucault, 18.

⁶⁸¹ Foucault, 18–19.

⁶⁸² Foucault, 18.

⁶⁸³ Foucault, 19.

addressed and answered this question by delineating conditions that “only concern the individual in his concrete existence” and those that concern “the structure of the subject as such”. In other words, as I will soon discuss further, their reverence for method has lead them to stipulate conditions that only pertain to the act of knowledge itself, while they have simultaneously also debated, and some of them have even stipulated conditions that require an alteration on behalf of the subject in order to understand the Qur’an. In respect to the latter, there is on the one end Cündioğlu’s emphasis on the self-sufficiency of objective knowledge in order to ascertain the meanings of the Qur’an, while on the other end, there is Öztürk and Alpyağıl’s additional emphasis on the subject’s transformation through self-knowledge as a condition for the reception or pursuit of the meanings of the Qur’an. As such, Turkish Qur’an hermeneutics can be seen to exhibit the interplay of both the Cartesian divorce of spirituality from a philosophy of knowledge as well as the Socratic harmony and interplay of both.

With these findings I have in addition discovered both an unanimity and divergence amongst the authors concerning the subjective and objective conditions requisite to reach the meanings of the Qur’an. In respect to the objective conditions of a Qur’an hermeneutics, Alpyağıl, Öztürk and Cündioğlu require that interpreters revere the diachrony of the Arabic language. Their views on objective conditions requisite for reaching the meanings of the Qur’an are unanimously grounded in the objective structures of language itself, such as the formal rules of language and its embeddedness in a historical horizon of meanings. However, in respect to subjective conditions, there is less unanimity among the authors, resulting in both subtle and major divergences. For example, Cündioğlu did not at all consider faith (*itikad*) to be a requirement to better understand the Qur’an while Alpyağıl did argue for its necessity. Nevertheless, what the exact similarities and differences are, and on which arguments these are grounded, will be further analysed in the next sections.

Subjectivity and truth

The least spiritual hermeneutics, and the one that resembles the Cartesian paradigm the most, can be found in the works of Cündioğlu. For Cündioğlu knowledge alone, as epitomized by proper method, is enough to warrant access to truth (the meanings of the Qur'an as intended by God). Accordingly, spiritual transformation as exemplified by the requirement of personal conviction is irrelevant for Cündioğlu. The ultimate arbiter in matters of interpretation is adherence to formal rules of method and the consolidation of solid hermeneutical presuppositions (*tasavvurat*). Not whether someone has, for example, converted to Islam or not.

Cündioğlu supports this hermeneutical principle with the reality of divergent interpretations in the history of *tafsīr*. For, as Cündioğlu argues, while we can discover the divergence of interpretations motivated by factional presuppositions in the tradition of *tafsīr*, we simultaneously witness the fact that different interpretations are maintained by members of the same school. One pertinent example concerning the latter, involves the problem of magic, that is whether there is any substantiality (*gerçeklik*) to magic. According to Cündioğlu, general Sunni thought exhibits a more accepting relationship towards the reality of magic and its subsequent presence in the Qur'an. However, the Mu'tazilīs outright reject the substantiality of magic. What is of note, in this regard, is the fact that Abū Ḥanīfa – the eponymous founder of one of the great schools of Sunni thinking – sides with the Mu'tazilīs on the matter, rather than with the dominantly held position by his own school and the other major Sunni schools of theology. This fact demonstrates to Cündioğlu that there are other elements that govern understanding above and beyond the mere fact of having accepted the faith of Islam (*mucерred iman kabullenіші*)⁶⁸⁴. For example, the theoretical suppositions held by the interpreter. As

⁶⁸⁴ Cündioğlu, *Anlamin buharlaşması ve Kur'an : Hermeneutik bir deneyim II*, 19.

such, as Cüendioğlu concludes, the ultimate fate of interpretations is decided by methodology (*metodoloji*), not one's creed (*itikad*)⁶⁸⁵.

This hermeneutical principle shares great thematic similarities with the fore-structures of understanding discussed in the works of Heidegger and Gadamer. This concept, which was explored in the second chapter in reference to Heidegger, argues that our understanding of something is preceded by an interplay of an advanced grasp of potential meanings (fore-having), our expectation of the appropriate way in which these meanings can appear (fore-sight), and the related conceptions that we have at our predisposal (fore-concept). For example, "I can see something as an implement, but not as a violin if I lack the concept of a violin."⁶⁸⁶ Similar to Heidegger and Gadamer, Cüendioğlu also makes the point that the preconceptions wherewith one enters the hermeneutical circle, will inevitably define the meaning one derives from something. Moreover, Cüendioğlu's works embody a similar Heideggerian point that "that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves."⁶⁸⁷ Yet, despite the similarities, in contrast to Heidegger and Gadamer who develop their arguments ontologically from the mode of human being (*Dasein*), Cüendioğlu explores the theme of the preconceptions of understanding through the familiar vocabulary of Arabic logic and dialectics.

In classical Arabic logic, rational judgements (*taşdīqāt*) are preceded by conceptions (*taşawwurāt*). Whether one can assert the fact that a human is a rational animal, is inevitably dependent on what is understood by "human", "rational", or "animal". Accordingly, there is an intimate relationship between conceptions and judgements by virtue of the fact that conceptions direct judgments. However, judgments can

⁶⁸⁵ Cüendioğlu, 19.

⁶⁸⁶ Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 107.

⁶⁸⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 2001, 195.

inversely be tested on account of whether the conceptions they are based on are sound. As Cündioğlu puts it, “When our conceptions are inaccurate, our propositions that exhibit judgments will inevitably also be inaccurate.”⁶⁸⁸ Since Interpretations also express judgment concerning a state of affairs, namely the meaning purported by Qur’an, they are likewise preceded by their own share of theoretical pre-conceptions, which can also be tested in accordance with the soundness of the presuppositions underlying their claims.

The dichotomy between *taşawwurāt-taşdīqāt* expresses in this sense the dichotomy between hermeneutics and exegesis. According to this dichotomy our judgments are preceded, grounded, and directed by our conceptions. Likewise, our exegesis of the Qur’an is comprised of our judgments concerning the meanings of the Qur’an, whereas hermeneutics is comprised of our preconceptions that precede and direct such assertions. For Cündioğlu, there was a practical reason for this deliberate bifurcation, namely, to gain a more pragmatic footing for dealing with rampant misunderstandings of the Qur’an. Rather than criticizing each individual interpretation, Cündioğlu wanted to address the issue of existing interpretations on a thematic level, that is in respect to their weak subjectivist, theoretical foundations. Accordingly, Cündioğlu deliberately directed his critique from the exegetical sphere to the hermeneutical sphere by primarily focusing on foundational questions preceding any interpretation, rather than the particularities of different interpretations⁶⁸⁹.

Only properly scrutinized conceptions can become the basis for solid, accepted postulates (*musalammāt*) supporting interpretations. In other words, when our interpretations are based on conceptions that have weathered the critical test and have been publicly accepted, can they truly become sustainable and convincing. Interpretations that are based on unquestioned and private falsities, will according

⁶⁸⁸ Cündioğlu, *Anlamin buharlaşması ve Kur’an : Hermeneutik bir deneyim II*, 13.

⁶⁸⁹ Cündioğlu, xi.

to Cüendioğlu come under scrutiny by future critics, resulting in the house of exegetical cards to collapse. Moreover, interpretations that have no clear and distinct principles that are logically proven, will be impotent (*ilzam edici olmaz*) and unconvincing. Cüendioğlu argues that subjectivist interpretations without solid theoretical grounds become by their very nature withdrawn and timid, losing their critical lustre, since one cannot have the confidence that their claims signify the ultimate truth of things. Nevertheless, Islam as Cüendioğlu countered, entered the public sphere by challenging and criticizing the general praxis and convictions held by the 7th century inhabitants of the Arabic Peninsula. Moreover, not only did the Qur'an appeal to its audience with its own critique, but it also recorded and debated the counterpoints made by its detractors within its own text. Accordingly, an approach for Cüendioğlu that is truer to the Qur'an would be to make solid, intersubjective claims that can fend for themselves in a critical, public debate.

Cüendioğlu's prioritizing of method (*metodoloji*) over faith (*itikad*) results in a hermeneutical framework that provides access merely on the grounds of knowledge alone. Anyone that holds the right theoretical suppositions, will thus be able to access the truth of the Qur'an. The type of person⁶⁹⁰ who holds these theoretical suppositions is irrelevant. This is complemented by the fact that there are no notable references in Cüendioğlu's work towards classical spiritual practices or concepts in Islam that would suggest there are indeed also spiritual requisites for understanding the Qur'an. There is no explicit mention of purification rituals, love, piety (*taqwā*), or the effects of sin on the experience of truth to be found in Cüendioğlu's works. To give an example of the latter, a recurrent Islamic symbol is the "hardening of hearts" by excessive sinning. However, as the Qur'an states, the ones whose hearts have hardened do not have the same experience to truth as those whose hearts are soft: "Is one whose heart Allah has opened to Islam, so that he has received Enlightenment from Allah, (no better than one hard-hearted)? Woe

⁶⁹⁰ For example, pure or impure, or believer or unbeliever.

to those whose hearts are hardened against celebrating the praises of Allah! they are manifestly wandering (in error)!”⁶⁹¹

Alpyağıl, in contrast to Cündioğlu, does require the subject’s transformation and self-knowledge as means to access the Qur’an. While Alpyağıl does not deny the productive role of method, he does deny the fact that method is more fundamental for the process of understanding than, for example, lived faith. On the contrary, Alpyağıl is very explicit concerning the latter by arguing that Muslims have a distinct privilege in regard to understanding the Qur’an. A privilege that Muslims receive by virtue of their special relationship as subjects who properly recognize and practice the Qur’an’s message.

To establish an epistemology that prioritizes spirituality over method, Alpyağıl explored a variety of hermeneutical questions from two different paradigms. In his first work, Alpyağıl reflected on the problem of method through such questions as how understanding is affected by the object without any deliberate action on the part of the subject, whether the ontological status of both the subject and the object characterize the process of understanding, and finally to what extent practice by the subject defines understanding. These questions were predominantly answered from a Heideggerian perspective on the matter. Whereas in his second work, Alpyağıl questioned how the same phenomena was experienced differently by various parties, and whether interpretation had any role in the divergency of experience. These questions, on the other hand, were predominantly answered from a Wittgensteinian perspective on the matter. Nevertheless, despite the different questions and paradigms, one theme remained constant in Alpyağıl’s thinking, and that was to reflect on the aesthetical and ontological elements of understanding. This, in contrast to the focus of pursuing which interpretative instruments facilitate understanding or justify the objective status of interpretations, which was central to Cündioğlu’s work.

⁶⁹¹ Qur’an 39:22

Motivated by Heidegger's theory of ontology, Alpyağıl was able to come to the conclusion that understanding needs praxis in order to bring about the right context for a certain meaning to appear. Heidegger had argued that a hammer disclosed its meaning only through its relevance for the carpenter as expressed by the act of hammering. Accordingly, when we abstract away the hammer from the practice of hammering, the hammer is no longer able to disclose to us its significance as a hammer. In such an instance, it might merely be a piece of wood with a piece of steel attached at its tail end. Likewise, one may only come to know the real significance of the Qur'anic injunctions of fasting, charity, and so forth, by actually engaging in fasting and charity as a believer. Hence, as Alpyağıl argues, a subject uninvolved in these tenets of Islam will not fully understand these practices as they are conveyed by the Qur'an.

It is clear for Alpyağıl that not all engagements with meaningful objects are realised through an incessant and deliberate procedure wherewith the meaning of things can be contrived. On the contrary, there are certain experiences, as in the case of art, and to a certain degree also the Qur'an, where the subject becomes a passive receptor of meaning directed by the object itself. In other words, some meanings are received beyond the control of the subject. Nevertheless, what ultimately defines for Alpyağıl the degree in which this meaning is received, is still related to how well the subject adheres to a set of personal requirements.

These subjective requirements were enumerated by Alpyağıl as follows: adherence to a proper politics of recognition (*tanıma siyaseti*), have awareness of personal finitude (*fanilik bilinci*), harbour good will (*iyi istenç*), and exercise common sense (*sağ duyu*). Out of these requirements, two are the most reminiscent of previously held discussions on spirituality and truth, namely the knowledge of personal finitude and adherence to a proper politics of recognition. Alpyağıl stated the following in this regard, "The knowledge of finitude, is the awareness of

humankind's limitations, that there cannot be an absolute subject (*mutlak özne*), and that they [i.e. humans] cannot encompass (*kuşatmayacağını*) all knowledge.”⁶⁹² Accordingly, by acknowledging finitude, the subject has no other option in Alpyağıl's framework but to relinquish the belief in self-sufficiency and become open to receive truth from the outside (e.g. other people, art, but also the Qur'an). Truth is thus only received through attending to oneself and learning to become aware of the self's finitude. Likewise, continuing the theme of spiritual requisites for attaining truth, Alpyağıl has argued that the truth of things only becomes disclosed when they are approached with the right politics of recognition. Alpyağıl uses the example of a state that has declared independence. Such a state can only signify the meaning of its independent statehood if it is actually recognized as a state by other nation states. Likewise, in the case of the Qur'an, the Qur'an can transfer its truth as God's revelation only if it is recognized beforehand as God's final revelation. However, as Alpyağıl argued, this recognition is only possible when the subject has prepared himself by way of faith.

Only those who possess faith are able to experience the truth of things in an exclusive manner. This theme, already established by Alpyağıl's earlier discussed ideas, was further continued and explored in his second work in reference to Wittgenstein's concept of seeing-as. With the concept of seeing-as, a variety of phenomenological and hermeneutical facts were communicated by Alpyağıl. Firstly, that the same object could be perceived in different ways by the same subject on account of an alteration on behalf of the subject. For example, one could observe an initially unfamiliar face, and subsequently realise that it is actually a person they recognise from the past. In such a case, the face observed is the same face, yet comprehended in two different ways by virtue of an aspect that dawned upon the subject. Accordingly, even a previously staunch nihilist, who saw the world devoid of higher meaning, could – after a religious experience – come to see the hand of God in all of creation. Secondly, there is an immediacy to perception that precedes

⁶⁹² Alpyağıl, *Kimin tarihi, hangi hermenötik? : Kur'an'ı anlama yolunda felsefi denemeler* 1, 71.

deliberation. A rabbit might hop by, resulting in the bystander exclaiming “rabbit!” without any planned deliberation preceding such a proclamation. Likewise, a believer would be able exclaim “God!” or “miracle!” when reading scripture, without having to resort to interpretation.

Understanding, in terms of seeing-as, is hence distinct and more immediate than interpretation in Alpyağıl’s thinking. A distinction that is further characterised by another set of characteristic differences between understanding and interpretation. Firstly, by the fact that understanding is an experience, whereas an interpretation is something one does. Secondly, interpretations can be invalidated but someone’s experience of something simply cannot. Finally, interpretations are deemed to be coercive by Alpyağıl on account of their nature to argue the reality behind appearances. The experience of seeing-as, on the other hand, is not dependent on evidence or inference. Rather, one sees something as something automatically (*kendiliğinden*) without any required effort.

Since experience precedes deliberation in terms of priority, it is no surprise that in Alpyağıl’s framework, logical arguments have no fundamental and imperative sway over the subject, as they did in Cündioğlu’s framework. Religious proofs (*kanıtlar*) have only a significance for subjects that have been conditioned through their culture to affirm the reality projected by the proof in question. Someone who lacks the needed experiences, will not be able to see the truth of the matter as argued. Alpyağıl cites in this regard a very relevant verse from the Qur’an that explains that if Muhammad had received a divine book which his detractors could touch, they would immediately claim that “This is nothing but obvious magic!”⁶⁹³ In other words, rather than seeing such an event as a divine miracle, the Meccan polytheists would provide an alternate response, which is the fact that they are being hexed.

⁶⁹³ Qur’an 6:7

Similar to Alpyağıl, Öztürk also qualifies the quest for truth with conditions that pertain to the structure of the subject. In his earlier work, Öztürk establishes this qualification in reference to the concept of the *muvaḥakât-ı Ömer*, namely the historical fact that Umar, a companion of Muhammad, was able to offer an opinion on a matter that was subsequently vindicated through revelation. For Öztürk, such a historical occurrence is proof of the fact that humans are able to project their will in ways that are congruent with the Divine Will of God. Accordingly, there are two implications that can be drawn from Umar's interpretative conduct. First, it is quite possible to address new issues in accordance with God's will in the absence of relevant verses. Second, true understanding is in Öztürk's framework always to understand the purpose (*maksat*) beyond the expression (*lafız*). Thus, even if there are verses that have an apparent and direct solution to a matter, it is still possible to argue over and against the literal position of the text by referencing the fundamental purpose behind the letter of the law, rather than the letter itself. However, before one is able to advance into such this kind of interpretative practice, Öztürk requires that he or she must be rational, scrupulous (*vicdan sahibi*), genuinely faithful, and in full submission (*teslimiyet*) to God.

While Öztürk stipulated the spiritual requirements an interpreter must fulfil, he did not provide any philosophical arguments to support or clarify them. Thus, we are only told that a believer must be scrupulous and faithful but not explicitly why. Alpyağıl's arguments are for that matter better developed than those of Öztürk's. Nevertheless, it can be logically surmised through the notion of correspondence that an interpreter without scruples who is motivated by injustice could not possibly project a vision on the world that corresponds with the vision of a just God. Hence, only a subject that is thoroughly just at the very core of their being can ultimately interpret the world in ways that correspond with the will of a just God.

The problem of subjective requirements was further revisited in a later work of Öztürk in explicit relation to the status of method. For Öztürk, the history of

sectarian strife in Islam cannot be explained by mere difference in method but has to be related to a deeper-rooted problem of amorality in the field of interpretation. In other words, for Öztürk interpretative differences, and thus, obstructions to the truth of the Qur'an, have more to do with the interpreter's capacity to show consideration (*iz'an*), fairness (*insaf*), and character (*ahlak*) to the interpreting other, and less to do with method. Öztürk had become very much aware in his career that both classical and modern understandings of the Qur'an are more often than not driven by ideological motivations, rather than by a sincere drive for the truth of the Qur'an. In respect to the greater tradition of kalam, Öztürk observes that authors go through various lengths in order to read their sectarian presuppositions into the Qur'an. Such a reading could be thoroughly methodical. However, this does not mean that the reading is sincere. Similarly, modern interpreters in Turkey, often resort to simple ideological rhetoric in order to argue for a transhistorical reading of the Qur'an. However, by psychologising such interpretations, Öztürk demonstrated that these kinds of interpretations are often insincere and incoherent. As such, it is no surprise that Öztürk's ultimate conclusion on the status of subjectivity in interpretation, prioritizes personal requirements before method, and argues that an interpreter should always read the Qur'an in a way that allows for the interpreter to look him or herself in the eye.

The most important question in Öztürk's thinking is thus not what the arguments are that underly interpretations but how sincere an interpreter arrived at such an interpretation. Method does not have a role, as one might otherwise expect, to guarantee indubitable and scientifically secure interpretations of the Qur'an but that interpretations are authentic and not distorted. Öztürk argues that the Qur'an should not be the platform for interpreters to project their fanatical or whimsical interpretations. Rather, in order to safeguard the lines between distortion of the text (*tahrīf*) and genuine interpretation of the text (*ta'wīl*), it is necessary that interpretations are based on principles that can be inspected and tested. However, since scientific principles are not a guarantee of absolute knowledge in Öztürk's

framework either, this means that one can at best claim that their interpretations are genuine, and not so much that they are incontestable truths. In Öztürk's thinking truth can only be aspired; it is not something that one can claim to have reached with absolute certainty and exclusive ownership. Every interpretation embodies a degree of speculation, and therefore, potential cavities that can be questioned and revised.

Objectivity and language

In the previous section I focused on the comparison of various subjective requirements that a subject must or must not impose on themselves in order to reach the truth of the Qur'an. Accordingly, I demonstrated a strong divergence between Cündioğlu's views and those held by Alpyağıl and Öztürk. While the prior stipulates no subjective requirements, the latter two authors did. However, the latter's awareness of subjective requirements, does not preclude them to additionally also stipulate objective requirements. As we saw earlier, these two authors, respectively Öztürk and Alpyağıl, never intended to juxtapose subjective requirements and objective requirements in order to abandon the latter in favour of the prior, but to argue that subjective requirements are also necessary and, in some cases, more fundamental than objective requirements. Accordingly, while subjectivity is embraced by two of the Turkish authors, this acceptance never reaches a point that meaning becomes completely relative to what the subject understands as the case might be in some esoteric and sophist traditions. A human is not by any degree the ultimate measure of all things for the Turkish thinkers, as Protagoras once claimed. On the contrary, as all three authors unanimously agree, the interpreter must also know and revere the objective structures of language itself, such as its rule-based nature and its embeddedness in history (diachrony).

In contrast to the previous section, this part of the discussion on hermeneutical conditions will focus on the conditions that do not pertain to the structure of the

subject. On the contrary, the focus will be on conditions that are realized by fulfilling the internal and external requirements of knowledge. For example, all three authors require that the interpreter must know the Arabic language as practiced during the times of revelation. However, this condition requires no alteration on behalf of the subject itself. To put it in terms that were made familiar in the previous section, an interpreter must not first convert or become morally conscientious before they can fulfil the condition of knowing the Arabic language.

While not always as direct and explicitly argued, I can confidently argue that one of the primary motivations behind the constructive relationship towards the need for objective requirements in understanding, stems from the classical Islamic notion that the Qur'an is God's spoken word. This fact was demonstrated through a variety of returning concepts in the works of the Turkish thinkers, such as the Qur'an being God's *kelam* (speech) which exhibited the *murad-i ilahi* (the divine intent). Accordingly, all three authors advocated that the Qur'an "speak for itself", namely as it is intended by God and independent from what the subject wishes for the text to say. For example, Cündioğlu observed that contemporary interpreters were reading into the Qur'an, rather than from the Qur'an. One of the priorities of his first work was to invert this relationship through the emphasis on objectively interpreting the Qur'an, thereby allowing the Qur'an to speak for itself, rather than made to speak (*kONUşturmak*) in ways that serve the interpreter. The Qur'an had to become *müfessir* (self-explaining) again, rather than *müfesser* (explained from the outside). Alpyağıl, on the other hand, argued that interpretation should be grounded in a process that allows for the text to 'open itself up' (*metnin açılımına*) to the reader. Interpreters should always serve the text. Hence, the interpreter, as crassly as Alpyağıl put it, should never force him or herself unto the text, thereby bringing about the 'rape of the text'. Finally, for Öztürk there is no doubt that in the classical and modern interpretative tradition, the Qur'an was made to speak on behalf of the interests of the interpreter. Hence, Öztürk plead for sincerity in

interpretation in order to objectively read from the Qur'an and not subjectively into it.

Besides the character of the Qur'an, the need for objectivity also stems from the history of Qur'an studies in Turkey. To recall an observation made in the introduction, recent Turkish theories on Qur'an hermeneutics came to exist as a critique on arbitrary and disingenuous interpretations of the Qur'an. Hence, it is no surprise that the case for objective requirements in interpretation are motivated by Alpyağıl, Cündioğlu, and Öztürk's own perception of what they think are arbitrary or distorted interpretations of the Qur'an. Each author, as we saw in previous chapters, localizes in their own way what the source of such interpretations is. For Cündioğlu one of the current sources of arbitrary and distorted interpretations of the Qur'an are the contemporary politically correct readings of the Qur'an. Traditionally speaking, men were allowed, based on a reading of verse 4:34, to swat their disobedient wives outside the facial area with a small wooden toothbrush. However, contemporary readings of the Qur'an, in order to be politically correct, distort the Qur'an's historical meaning by advocating a reading of the verse that advises a husband to expulse from himself his disobedient wife. Likewise, Alpyağıl disqualifies readings of the Qur'an that wish to read the Qur'an in scientist and historicist terms in order to become more relatable. This results in subjective readings of the Qur'an that are loaded with anachronistic, scientific jargon. Finally, comparable to both Alpyağıl and Cündioğlu, Öztürk also detects excesses in interpretations in the contemporary ideological and scientist readings of the Qur'an. Especially in those readings that ideologically advocate universalist and transhistorical readings of the Qur'an. However, unlike his peers, Öztürk ventures one step further by also extending his critique to classical readings of the Qur'an.

Despite the different perspectives on which kinds of interpretations must be corrected by a proper hermeneutics, there is still a common motif to the thinking of the three Turkish thinkers. Each author cements their commitment towards

objectivity with a particular philosophy of language. For each author objectivity in understanding is called for and guaranteed by language. All three authors share the premise that God's revelation is expressed through language. Language, is however communal, has a historicity to its essence, and functions only when it is intersubjective. Since the medium of revelation is also language, it too must have an historical and intersubjective aspect to its character whose knowledge must become an objective requirement for interpreting the Qur'an.

In respect to Cündioğlu, we can go as far as to say that his entire hermeneutic enterprise hinges on the fact that an interpreter can understand the Qur'an objectively. Unlike the other authors, who maintain a more multivalent relationship to the idea of objectivity in interpretation, Cündioğlu's hermeneutics only concerns itself with establishing the rationale and method behind objectively interpreting the Qur'an. Accordingly, Cündioğlu's work is burdened with proving that objective understanding is not only possible but also a requirement.

Cündioğlu attempted to establish the rationale behind his objectivist position in his first work through the dialectics of meaning-conveyance and understanding. Cündioğlu made it very clear from the beginning of this work that the Qur'an is a linguistic phenomenon (*dilsel olgu*) or linguistic text (*nass-ı lugavî*). Linguistic utterances are not monological in essence: there is always a sender, message, and receiver involved in Cündioğlu's framework. However, the authority on how the message is understood, lies in Cündioğlu's framework not with the receiver but with the person that pronounced the message.

The first implication of this shift in authority, is that a message is unilaterally defined by the intention of the sender. However, the intention that construes the significance of an utterance, must be definite. As Aristotle argued, intending to signify everything, ultimately means that nothing is signified. Hence, in Cündioğlu's framework, radical meaning concurrency is highly impossible: the Qur'an cannot

intend everything simultaneously. On the other hand, a more modest meaning concurrency could technically be possible. Classical authorities such as al-Shāfiʿī have even argued that the Qurʾan has intended a handful of meanings in some verses in a concurrent fashion. However, as Cündioğlu argued, the majority of Ḥanafī scholars and even non-Ḥanafī scholars such as al-Ghazālī and al-Shāṭibī have expressed their dissent, and argued that meaning concurrency is either not present or highly unconventional in the Arabic language. Hence, in contrast to what certain relativists would like to propose, the premise of meaning concurrency cannot serve as a generic premise of any Qurʾan hermeneutics. Not every possible interpretation is the same in terms of value, since not all interpretations exemplify what was originally intended. There are inescapably wrong and right, and thus, less and more valuable interpretations in Cündioğlu's framework.

While the author of an utterance defines its meaning, there is inevitably a problem when the utterance is codified and read in absence of the presence of the original author. In a typical dialogical situation, one could easily discern in an objective manner what the intent of someone is in respect to a certain statement, simply by asking the interlocutor what he or she intended by a statement. However, in the case of a text, such as the Qurʾan, there is no such dialogical situation to speak of. Accordingly, as a solution, Cündioğlu presents the concept of natural connections (*söz'ün tabii bağlamı*). An utterance is a complex that always carries the following material relationships with itself: the what (content), the whom (addressee), the why (reason), the when and where (spatial-temporal circumstance), and finally the how (mode) of the expression. Accordingly, since the interlocutor is absent, the interpreter must ascertain his or her understanding in reference to the adequacy in which these aspects are reconstructed.

In Cündioğlu's second work, however, the relationship between language and the problem of objectivity was explored again through the dichotomy between the system of language vis-à-vis the performance of language. The Qurʾan, as previously

stated, is a text expressed in language. Language, however, has two fundamentally intersubjective aspects: the systematic rules and conventions that determine possible significations, and the ensuing results from the performance of the prior mentioned systematic rules and conventions. Accordingly, meaning is not determined by the subject, especially not through his or her arbitrary fancy, but rather only through a reproduction of the system and intention responsible for the actualization of the medium that is being interpreted. The exegetical enterprise is for this reason always reconstructive and objective.

The first range of concepts that Cündioğlu used to highlight and explore the intersubjective dimensions of language, pertained to the *lisan-kelam* dichotomy. While *lisan* represented the general system of a language, *kelam* represented *lisan* in application. For example, the *lisan* aspect of English would be to argue that the nominative case cannot be substituted for the accusative case: you have seen me, and not seen I. On the other hand, the *kelam* aspect of English would be represented by many different media, such as sonnets, plays, texts, and so forth, since all of these media have been actualised through the practice of *lisan*. *Lisan* is language in the sense of the system, and thus, anonymous. Whereas *kelam* is always authored, and therefore, always originated by a subject. Accordingly, *lisan* is passive, static without subject, while *kelam* is active, dynamic, and always realised by a subject. Now then, to relate these concepts back to the Qur'an, the Qur'an is also a *kelam*, and the subject that authored this *kelam* by putting the Arabic *lisan* to use is God.

There is undeniably a complex reciprocal relationship at work between *lisan* and *kelam* in Cündioğlu's framework with important hermeneutical consequences. For starters, prior performances of language have the capacity to become part of the conventional use of signs, i.e. the *muvâdaa*⁶⁹⁴. Interlocutors could establish through

⁶⁹⁴ Dil'in genel bilgisi is an alternative formulation, or Turkish translation that Cündioğlu provides in his second book p. 54

denotations new relations between signs and objects, which through communal agreement can become part of the *muḩâdaa* repository of significations.

Accordingly, in the absence of the original dialogical situation, the *muḩâdaa* can become an important reference to understand what a word could have possibly signified during a certain period of a linguistic community's history. The *muḩâdaa* establishes whether words were used metaphorically (*mecazî*) or literally (*zahîrî*). A present-day interpreter may therefore not argue based on their private opinion that an expression in the Qur'an should be taken metaphorically instead of literally. Rather, they must justify such an interpretation through a reference to the earlier mentioned *muḩâdaa*.

On the other hand, Cündioğlu's framework is not willing to go as far as to argue that knowing what words historically signified is enough to understand the Qur'an. Rather, and this is where his theory returns again to the problem of the subject and the performance of language, the intent of the interlocutor (*kasd'ul-mütekelîm*), must also be taken into account. A word can be polysemic, even when it is considered only in respect to what it meant a certain time frame. Take for example the Arabic word *fawq*, which could signify elevation in rank or elevation in physical space. This same word is related to God in verse 6:61: "He is the irresistible, (watching) from above [*fawq*] over His worshippers"⁶⁹⁵. Accordingly, an exegetical dilemma follows suit: is God above believers in physical space or in rank? Both significations are from the perspective of *muḩâdaa* possible. However, the secure way forward for Cündioğlu is by referencing the original intent as the proper means wherewith this dilemma can be resolved. God could not have meant that he is above his servants in physical space, for that would anthropomorphize God and jeopardize his transcendence. Hence, when we try to reconstruct the original signification, it is only logical that we consider the verse to mean that God is above humans in rank.

⁶⁹⁵ Qur'an 6:61

There is no denying that Cündioğlu's philosophy of language is inspired by Saussure's linguistics. The distinction between *lisan* and *kelam*, is no different from Saussure's differentiation between *langue* and *parole*. Admittedly, Cündioğlu does not hide the fact that his ideas are partly inspired by Saussure, and even announces in his preface that he will address the problem of the interpretation of the Qur'an through the insights garnered from recent developments in linguistics. Cündioğlu merely contextualizes and elaborates on Saussure's concepts through a vocabulary that is familiar to his mostly Muslim audience, and further infers from these concepts the necessary hermeneutical implications. In this sense, Cündioğlu follows in the footsteps of Ricoeur and Derrida, as both of these authors have also drawn the necessary hermeneutical consequences from Saussure's understanding of language.

Alpyağıl, on the other hand, relies more strictly on Wittgenstein to make a similar hermeneutical case for objectivity as Cündioğlu did. Two important notions from Wittgenstein's thought were incorporated into Alpyağıl's Qur'an hermeneutics: rule-following and private language use. By exploring Wittgenstein's reflections on these matters, Alpyağıl was able to conclude in a similar vein to Cündioğlu that language could only function when it was setup and practiced intersubjectively. Only in congruence with pre-established, objective conventions can language users express anything meaningful. Inversely, interpreters can only properly understand something when they fulfil the objective requirement of referencing the same conventions. Accordingly, interpreters that explain the Qur'an in ways that circumvent the established conventions of the language community to which the Qur'an belongs, are engaging in a practice that would be akin to private language use. Primarily, because such interpreters decide on their own accord, rather than that of a community, what certain signs refer to. However, as Alpyağıl argued, arbitrary denotation is philosophically speaking an incoherent idea.

For Alpyağıl, language use and the concept of rule-following are intrinsically related to each other. This fact was most clearly argued in reference to Searle's differentiation between constitutive rules and regulative rules. Rules either regulate pre-established activities or establish whether an act constitutes an activity. The activity of driving exists independently of the rule to not drive through red lights. Hence, even if the rule that forbids driving through red lights did not exist, one could still partake in the activity that is called driving. However, in checkers, the activity of playing checkers is constituted by the rule that pieces may only move onto dark squares. Without this rule, one would not be able to play checkers. As Searle argued, whereas regulative rules often take the form of imperatives, constitutive rules take the form of "x counts as y" or "in the context of c, x counts as y". Accordingly, when this typology of rules is further related to language, we are told by Alpyağıl that language is also comprised of constitutive rules. For example, a promise can only be actualized if a certain set of rules are followed. One simply cannot randomly use language in order to promise something.

Since language depends on a communal set of rules, there is inevitably an intersubjective character to language. Rules serve as a frame of reference wherewith an activity can be tested in accordance with its conformity to a rule. They do not belong privately to the individual but to a community. Accordingly, one can objectively argue whether an individual has conformed to rule or not. It is by virtue of such a fact that native English speakers can correct others that have just started to speak English in way that is counter to the grammatical conventions of English. Likewise, interpreters that apply themselves to the Arabic language of the Qur'an in ways that are alien and foreign to the constitutive rules of the Arabic language, can also be held accountable by Alpyağıl. As such, arguing that a 7th century text such as the Qur'an contains references to the modern theory of relativity or quantum theory, is for Alpyağıl akin to claim that it is possible for a person to say it is cold but mean that it is actually warm, or that one can substitute in a game of chess, chess pieces for checker stones.

Interpreters that subjectively, and therefore, privately define what the words of the Qur'an signify, prompt according to Alpyağıl the debate on private language use. In other words, their behaviour relates to the question as to whether it is possible for someone to define on their own accord, without resorting to pre-established rules, what certain symbols signify. For Alpyağıl, the private language hypothesis is internally riddled with inconsistencies. A key inconsistency pertained to the inability of a private language user to employ a sign in order to reference the same object over and over. There is simply no possibility for the subject to know whether their experience of an object corresponds to an earlier made up signifier. The subject could not determine that the experience they had on Tuesday and the sign they wrote to record this experience, actually conforms to the experience they subsequently had on Wednesday. Accordingly, even the representation of private experiences in language, pain included, is depended on a pre-established convention through language. Only in the context of a pre-established communal language, can an individual always ascertain and express their experiences in a persistent way in language.

The objective aspects of rule-following, however, do not entirely discount the role of the subject in the process of following rules. Alpyağıl reminds us firstly that tradition, and therefore, conventions and rules, are contingent. For example, the Qur'an argues in verse 25:67 that the servants of God are neither extravagant nor stingy when they perform charity. However, extravagance or stinginess are concepts relative to a variety of contingent facts. It could well be that an act is considered in one culture or instance to be an expression of extravagance, whereas in another culture or instance it might be considered to be an expression of frugality. Hence, to apply a rule that demands the avoidance of extravagance and stinginess, a subject must interpret the right parameters of what constitutes extravagance and stinginess.

To apply a rule necessitates the interpretation of a rule, and this in turn necessitates practical wisdom. Alpyağıl refers in this regard directly to the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* (prudence). It is by virtue of prudence, that the individual can judge individual situations in accordance with a particular rule. Accordingly, by applying practical wisdom, the subject could judge whether an action represents in a given situation generosity, miserliness, or extravagance.

The fact that the subject is allowed to interpret a rule, does not mean that the subject's own judgment is the ultimate arbiter in the matter. Rather, the final judgment on whether a rule was correctly applied, still rests in the hands of the community. Signposts can be read in a multitude of ways. However, whether the interpretation of a signpost was correct, is ultimately dependent on how a linguistic community has defined the symbols present on a signpost. Consequently, if a subject were to interpret the Qur'an, it is ultimately the Islamic community that will validate whether the offered interpretation is sound or not.

There is no denying that in Alpyağıl's framework the relationship between language, subjectivity, objectivity, and interpretation, are arranged in a much more complex way than Cündioğlu's straightforward objectivism. Firstly, because Alpyağıl's framework enables a degree of flexibility in interpreting the Qur'an that is simultaneously static as well as dynamic. On the one hand, an interpretation is relatively independent of the existence of a specific subject, since the reference of the interpretation is not the private view of the interpreter but the understanding of the community. Which, in the case of a radical subjectivist position, would be the opposite, since in such a framework a particular type of understanding cannot exist unless it is related to the contingent genius of a specific subject. However, on the other hand, Alpyağıl fully acknowledges the contingency of what constitutes the right application of certain rules. This allows for new interpretations to be offered with the requirement that their value is not defined by the subject but by the community to which the text, language, and the subject belong. As such, as I will

further thematize in the next chapter, there is a constructive view on the diachrony of interpretations to be discovered in Alpyağıl's framework that is directed by a dialectics between subjectivity and objectivity. Not all historically unknown interpretations of a verse are therefore by default discarded.

Öztürk's position, however, is reminiscent in parts to Cündioğlu's thinking as well as that of Alpyağıl. The objective meaning of a verse is the meaning that was historically understood by the first audience of the Qur'an. In this sense, Öztürk's position is highly similar to that of Cündioğlu who likewise regarded the objective meaning of the Qur'an to be located in the historical horizon of its revelation. However, the objective reconstruction of the historical significance is but one requirement to the process of understanding, for what the Qur'an signified historically, does not necessarily mean what it will signify for the present. Rather, based on the requirements of a specific age, the interpreter will have to abstract away the historically contingent aspects of certain verses in order to start a mediation between the current context and the transcendent, timeless ideals of the Qur'an. Accordingly, similar to Alpyağıl, Öztürk's work also constitutes an important dialectical relationship that always seeks to mediate between the interpreter's objective and subjective understanding of a verse.

The most important premise undergirding this duality between the objective and subjective understanding of the Qur'an, comes from the belief that modern audiences are not the direct addressees of the Qur'an. On the contrary, for Öztürk there is no doubt that the direct addressees of the Qur'an are in fact the Prophet and his community. Moreover, the message of the Qur'an has been tailored to the experiences and understanding of this community. Partially, because the Qur'an has responded to the experiences of its first audience through the various answers given to societal issues, but also because the Qur'an related its message through the familiar Arabic language of its audience. Hence, the objective meaning of the Qur'an always refers to what the Qur'an signified for the first audience of the

Qur'an, and not to what present-day interpreters might read in light of their own personal experiences of the text and its language. On the other hand, the subjective meaning is always the meaning that is understood from the Qur'an post-revelation as read anew in light of contingent circumstances.

This bifurcation leads Öztürk to acknowledge historical readings of the Qur'an, even if they are not palatable by modern sensibilities. There is indeed an injunction in the Qur'an that commands one to cut hands of a thief. This is an objective, historical fact in Öztürk's framework. However, the presence of an injunction within the Qur'an, does not necessarily mean that a modern reader needs to apply the Qur'anic injunction as it is presented. For, it is not the form in which expressions are communicated that represents the timeless message of the Qur'an but the ultimate purpose behind the expressions that represents the transcendent message of the Qur'an.

By virtue of the form-purpose distinction, Öztürk is able to direct the understanding of the Qur'an beyond the mere confines of what has literally been stated by the Qur'an. From a language philosophical point of view, Öztürk argued that the form of an expression cannot be regarded as the coterminous stand-in for what the author wishes to convey. Rather, the linguistic form of an expression should be regarded as a contingent vehicle, a particular example wherewith intent (*maksat*) of the author is expressed. Hence, what an author intended is not necessarily limited by what an author said.

The emphasis on purpose rather than form, also means that Öztürk's hermeneutics includes an element of psychologisation. For, one no longer restricts their inquiry to what is said but why something is said. Accordingly, in Öztürk's framework, it is quite objectively clear that God announced in Arabic that the hands of a thief must be cut. However, the question as to why God announced such an injunction, is answered by unearthing the reason *raison d'être* behind the injunction. Öztürk

argued that the injunction of cutting hands was announced in order to protect private property and correct the thief. However, with present-day resources it is quite possible to implement God's will in ways that might be better than what was historically suggested by the Qur'an.

This binary perspective on subjectivity vis-à-vis objectivity also had further implications for the status of the traditional Islamic sciences. In Öztürk's view, *tafsīr* is the science that pertains to the reconstruction of the earlier mentioned objective historical meaning of the Qur'an. On the other hand, *fiqh* and *kalam* are the sciences that pertain themselves to establishing the significance of the Qur'an for a particular age. *Fiqh* does this certainly in reference to the legal elements of the Qur'an, while *kalam* does this in respect to theological aspects of the Islamic experience.

Conclusion

In respect to the different subjective and objective requirements requisite to understanding and interpreting the Qur'an, the hermeneutical theories of the three Turkish thinkers have both demonstrated important points of divergence as well as convergence.

One noteworthy point of recurrent contestation between the different authors, concerned the problem of whether faith is a condition one must impose on their being as a subject so as to have access to the meanings (truth) of the Qur'an. For Cündioğlu, the answer is clear: personal faith does not matter in respect to understanding or explaining the Qur'an, since it would otherwise undermine the Qur'an's universal address, and establish interpretations not on rational but fideist grounds. The Qur'an appeals to all, non-believers included, and must therefore be capable of being heard, understood, and acknowledged by those who do not profess faith in Islam. Moreover, the reception history of the Qur'an has clearly

demonstrated that believing Muslims belonging to even the same school of theology or jurisprudence would differ amongst each other. Hence, faith is neither a guarantee nor an impediment to understanding the Qur'an. Alpyağıl and Öztürk, however, both argued the opposite and claimed that being a Muslim was a subjective requirement for understanding the Qur'an. Of note is the fact that in contrast to Cündioğlu, the latter two did oppose the idea that the Qur'an is universally intelligible or universally appealing. For Alpyağıl the significance of something is determined by how it is recognized. Accordingly, if the Qur'an is not in advance believed to come from God, it will never be able to disclose its significance as God's final revelation unto humans. Rational arguments pertaining to religion, even those proving God's existence, are only meaningful to those who have already been initiated into religion. Likewise, for Öztürk the Qur'an's primary appeal and significance is only directed to its initial, historical audience. However, to infer the Qur'an's secondary significance, it is necessary that an interpreter fulfils personal requirements such as faith and submission towards God. For, only a person that is conscientious, scrupulous, and sincere is able to attune himself to God's will and lift the obstructions towards truth that might otherwise have been imposed through disingenuous ideological and sectarian biases. The bottom-line of an interpretation is less decided by whether one can make a rational case for an interpretation, since reason can be instrumentalized, and more so by whether it is motivated by personal sincerity or not.

Self-knowledge as a requirement to gain access to the Qur'an's meanings, was also a shared and disagreed upon theme in the arguments of the Turkish thinkers. Cündioğlu's works, conversely, did not contain any references to self-knowledge as an important ground for understanding the Qur'an. However, Alpyağıl and Öztürk did acknowledge this requirement and shared a similar conclusion in regard to this problem: the subject must recognize his or her own contingency in order to prepare themselves for the Qur'an. Alpyağıl spoke of *fanilik bilinci*, knowledge of one's epistemological finitude. In other words, the subject's knowledge of its inability to

self-sufficiently know everything, and thus, of its need to open up towards learning from others (including the Qur'an). Likewise, Öztürk spoke of truth's elusive nature, and how it can never become possessed (*temelluk*) by any subject in particular. Otherwise, as Öztürk implies, the subject will fall to an interpretive hubris fuelled by sectarian zeal, as some past exegetes had done according to Öztürk. Hence to summarize, for Öztürk, insincerity obstructs our ability to truthfully understand the Qur'an, since it guides us to read into the Qur'an, rather than from the Qur'an. However, sincerity is grounded in humility, which itself is grounded in the self-knowledge of one's incapacity to take absolute and sole possession of truth.

Where objective requirements are concerned, less disagreement is discovered amongst the authors. Each author is an advocate of objective requirements for understanding and interpreting the Qur'an. Their proposal for objectivity is supported by two premises. The first premise is that language has a nature that is historical, systematic, and inescapably intersubjective. For example, linguistic utterances have material aspects, as Cündioğlu argued, such as their concomitant intents. Hence, what defines the meaning of an utterance is not the subjective experience of its receptor but what its conveyor intended to objectively transmit. Likewise, as Alpyağıl argued, languages also have concrete rules that determine which meanings can be constructed under certain circumstances. One simply cannot utter "one item" in the English language and refer to two items. However, based on the first premise, each author shares a second premise, namely that the Qur'an, since it is expressed in language, also has a history, system, and objective character that must be revered in order to do justice to its nature. In Öztürk's case this means among other things that utterances in the Qur'an also have clear historical addressees and referents. Hence, one should always try to understand the Qur'an first in reference to the Qur'an's historical audience, rather than what one might personally experience by relating the Qur'an's direct address to oneself. Likewise, for Alpyağıl this means that interpreters cannot saddle their commentary with anachronistic jargon, since that runs counter against the diachronic nature of

the Qur'an and its language. The Qur'an, as Alpyağıl argued, could not have possibly referred to modern concepts such as thermodynamics, because 6th and 7th century Arabic did not have the means to express such a concept. Nor for similar reasons, as Cündioğlu objected, harbour certain ideologically modern concepts such as gender equality.

By stipulating objective requirements, the Turkish authors unanimously bar the exclusive reliance on subjectivity as a vindicator of one's interpretation. Accordingly, an overtly sceptical or mystical attitude towards meaning is both foreign and out-of-place within the frameworks of the authors studied. For example, there is clearly no view present in the hermeneutics of the Turkish thinkers that argues – based on epistemological arguments – that all meaning is relative to the subject's experience, and thereby equally true or valuable. Nor is there, for that matter, a view that one is able to discover the truth of the Qur'an exclusively on account of their personal relationship to God⁶⁹⁶. On the contrary, as it was recurrently made clear, the subject must also fulfil requirements that do not pertain to the structures of subjectivity but lay outside the subject itself, such as knowing how Arabic was practiced and understood during the time of the Qur'an's revelation.

The fact that all three authors advocate some form of objectivity, should however not be understood as a plea for a static understanding of the Qur'an, nor that any future exegetical activity of the Qur'an is by default stilted by its earlier reception history. On the contrary, in all three theories there is still a great deal of dynamism involved in how future interpreters can and should relate to the interpretation of the Qur'an. For example, as Alpyağıl argued, while it is true that one cannot employ the word miserliness in order to intend generosity, it is possible for a linguistic community to have a changing idea as to what they regard as miserliness or generosity. Accordingly, what objectively, that is according to linguistic convention,

⁶⁹⁶ For example, by being an elect friend or saint of God.

constitutes miserliness, can change over time, thereby allowing for new ways wherein the word can be understood. There is thus a great deal still to be said about the further implications of the earlier discussed theories and the problem of reading the Qur'an in different and new ways. However, this theme will be further worked out in the next chapter.

Surplus and Futurity of Meaning: The Status of New and Divergent Readings of the Qur'an

Introduction

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, it was argued that the current oversaturation of Qur'an interpretations in Turkey through the media of reformist, scientist, and relativist discourse in Turkey, was the dominant impetus behind a theoretical reinvestigation of the grounds on which the interpretation of the Qur'an should proceed. However, the problem of reading the Qur'an differently or in new ways is thematically tied to the status of subjectivity and objectivity in interpretation. To recall their organic relationship, the more objective understanding becomes emphasized, the less variant interpretations become appreciated; for the objective is the recurrent, that which gets identified over and over in the same way by different parties. On the other hand, the more the subject's private understanding is regarded as valid, the easier it becomes to constructively relate to the problem of variant interpretations, since subjectivity by default implies particularity, and hence, difference. As such, while we have been examining the problem of objectivity and subjectivity, there has without doubt been an inescapable practical consequence to these otherwise dull theoretical problems, namely what the status of new and different interpretations of the Qur'an are. The question as to what these practical consequences are for new readings, will be, as assured in the previous chapters, answered in the coming sections.

Before I advance further, however, into describing the implications of each author's theory to the problem of reading the Qur'an in new and variant ways, I would first like to establish the theoretical framework wherewith the subsequent analyses will be conducted. This framework will involve two new concepts: the surplus of meaning and the futurity of meaning. Both concepts will be explained in due turn,

starting with the concept of the surplus of meaning. These terms have specifically been chosen for a variety of reasons. First, the surplus of meaning is a concept that has its lexical roots in recent discussions in western philosophical hermeneutics, particularly in discussions involving Paul Ricoeur's work. By referring to an already existing concept, we are able to gain a more secure theoretical model for understanding the earlier discussed material on the Turkish thinkers. Moreover, while it is not the particular focus of this thesis, the appropriation of an already existing concept, will inevitably also function as an initiatory reflection on how Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics relates to recent discussions in western philosophical hermeneutics. Finally, I also wish to emphasize that the concept of the surplus of meaning, while borrowed, will ultimately be further worked out and tailored in its definition to suit the present context of Qur'an hermeneutics. Accordingly, I will (a) firstly contextualize the term surplus of meaning in regard to Ricoeur's work, (b) follow it by a discussion in which this concept is further worked out together with the concept of the futurity of meaning, and (c) relate both concept to the current discussion on the status of variant readings and the Qur'an.

The surplus of meaning and the double significance of symbols

The notion of surplus is usually invoked in an economic context, that is to denote the amount of money that is left when a vendor sells more than that they actually buy. Accordingly, in consideration of its conventional usage, we already know that the notion of surplus is related to excess and wealth. It should come as no surprise then, that a similar significance can also be found in some of the current hermeneutical discussions. Nevertheless, while the specialized usage of the term does not wander too far from its conventional usage, it still has its own nuances that need to be considered.

One of the more noteworthy usages of this concept is in the works of Paul Ricoeur (d. 2005). While Ricoeur has used the term at various turns, I wish to focus on one

of his earlier works, namely *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. This work, which currently exists as a collection of essays, was originally based on a range of lectures given by Ricoeur at the Texas Christian University in the fall of 1973, titled *Discourse and Surplus of Meaning*. The reason for choosing this work rests on the fact that the concept of the surplus of meaning is explicitly related to the problem of interpreting texts, which inevitably involves the subject of this thesis. Nevertheless, despite the emphasis on the concept through its titular presence, Ricoeur mentions the concept only a few times in a work that spans almost a hundred pages. Moreover, when the concept appears, it is a term that is explained in context, and not so much by an explicit definition extended to the reader by the author. Accordingly, to get a clear view of what the surplus of meaning entails, we must refer to the context in which the term is employed. Put differently, the significance of the surplus of meaning as employed by Ricoeur will only become apparent by retracing the interplay between the term and the surrounding text, purpose of the work, and overall arguments.

Ricoeur introduces the term surplus of meaning in his third essay *Metaphor and Symbol* in the context of understanding literary works. Accordingly, his main question rings as follows: “The question here is whether the surplus of meaning characteristic of literary works is a part of their signification or if it must be understood as an external factor, which is noncognitive and simply emotional.”⁶⁹⁷ Thus, the notion of surplus is introduced in terms of a characteristic that literary works have. However, what this characteristic is, and as well as what the answer to this question is, is made more apparent and concrete in the subsequent inquiry into how metaphors and symbols function.

In classical rhetoric the metaphor was conceptualized around the notion of the word, rather than the sentence. Hence, a metaphor is a word that extends the

⁶⁹⁷ Paul. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Text: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 45.

meaning of a word through deviation from its literal meaning. A deviation that stems from the desire to either “fill a semantic lacuna in the lexical code or to ornament discourse and make it more pleasing.”⁶⁹⁸ As Ricoeur states, we simply have more ideas than the words to express them, and hence, need to stretch the signification of known words by using metaphors. Moreover, in some cases we rely on figurative words, because a figurative expression is more persuasive. Thus, we heavily rely on resemblance in order to “ground the substitution of the figurative meaning of a word in place of the literal meaning, which could have been used in the same place.”⁶⁹⁹

As the last part of the previous sentence suggests, metaphors are not capable of creating new meanings according to this classical understanding. A metaphor is by this account always translatable, since the figurative word is understood to be a substitute for a literal meaning. No new information is provided about reality when a metaphor is put to use. In other words, as Ricoeur puts it in technical terms, a metaphor does not represent any form of semantic innovation⁷⁰⁰.

Conversely, Ricoeur’s own conceptualization of the metaphor does state that metaphors are able to confer new information about reality. Rather than arguing that the metaphor centres around the word, Ricoeur argues that a metaphor operates at the level of the sentence. Put differently, metaphors function on the level of predication, not denomination⁷⁰¹. In Ricoeur’s view the heart of the metaphor lies in the ‘semantic dissonance’ that we experience in the metaphor. In other words, in the absurdity that we experience through the tension between words in a metaphoric expression. For example, when a poet speaks of a “mantle of sorrow”, our *prima facie* understanding of the expression results by default in an interpretative uneasiness, since a literal pertinence between the notion of a

⁶⁹⁸ Ricoeur, 48.

⁶⁹⁹ Ricoeur, 49.

⁷⁰⁰ Ricoeur, 49.

⁷⁰¹ Ricoeur, 50.

garment of cloth and an abstract feeling of sorrow are irreconcilable. However, it is exactly this dissonance that invites us to resolve the 'semantic impertinence' with a second interpretation that is able to make sense between both notions by still looking for other levels of resemblances between both notions⁷⁰². Moreover, since we relate things in new ways to each other, we are thus conferred with new information about reality. As Ricoeur eloquently concludes, a metaphor is "a calculated error, which brings together things that do not go together and by means of this apparent misunderstanding it causes a new, hitherto unnoticed, relation of meaning to spring up between the terms that previous systems of classification had ignored or not allowed."⁷⁰³

It is this notion of semantic impertinence that Ricoeur further carries into the discussion of symbols, and concretely brings it into relationship with the concept of the surplus of meaning. Ricoeur had in a previous work described a symbol as "any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first."⁷⁰⁴ Accordingly, a symbol is something that has a double meaning. However, to get to this meaning, we are, as in the case of a metaphor, dependent upon two interpretations that we have to simultaneously oppose to each other. Since, it is by recognizing that the literal meaning falls short that we see that a symbol still contains more meaning. For example, we intuit in poem of Wordsworth that a sunrise signifies more than a simple meteorological phenomenon, and that in Babylonian myths the sea signifies more than the expanse of water that can be seen from the shore⁷⁰⁵. Hence, this surplus of meaning that we intuit "is the residue of the literal interpretation"⁷⁰⁶.

⁷⁰² Ricoeur, 51.

⁷⁰³ Ricoeur, 51.

⁷⁰⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde, Illinois (Northwestern University Press, 1974), 12–13.

⁷⁰⁵ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, 55.

⁷⁰⁶ Ricoeur, 55.

This notion of the surplus of meaning is further explicated by Ricoeur in relation to scripture through the example of the Exodus. Prima facie, the Exodus in the Bible refers to a well-known event that took place in the history of the Children of Israel. However, as Ricoeur argues, the Bible has more to say to us than what happened in history. Rather, it discloses on to us also “a certain state of wandering which is lived existentially as a movement from captivity to deliverance.”⁷⁰⁷ Accordingly, the double meaning present in the Exodus not only retells a historical event but also becomes “the means of detecting a condition of being”⁷⁰⁸.

To recapitulate, certain expressions have the ability to confer more meaning than what is experienced from an initial reading. The excess of meaning present in such expressions invites multiple interpretations, so that their secondary meaning can be reached. Thus, the surplus of meaning is a phenomenon that from its very nature relates to the problem of multiple meanings and variant interpretations.

Excess and futurity

Now that a prefatory understanding of the surplus of meaning has been presented through Ricoeur’s works, I wish to further develop this understanding in relation to the present thesis. Starting with differentiating between a qualitative and quantitative approach to the surplus of meaning, and followed by a further discussion on the its relationship to the problem of diachrony and futurity of meaning.

In the previous section, Ricoeur presented an understanding of the surplus of meaning that I wish to further characterize as a quantitative approach to the surplus of meaning. To further clarify this, Ricoeur spoke of double, hence multiple, meanings in regard to the nature of symbols. In this sense, there is a quantitative

⁷⁰⁷ Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 66.

⁷⁰⁸ Ricoeur, 66.

approach to the problem of surplus, namely there is an understanding that an excess in meaning signifies the possibility of inferring multiple meanings from the same object of understanding. Symbols, as the example of the Exodus demonstrated, can both be understood literally, that is historically, as well as existentially. Alternately it is also possible to understand the surplus of meaning in qualitative terms. For example, one could argue that the surplus of meaning in the case of the Qur'an pertains to the transformative influence effected by an understanding of the Qur'an. In other words, the surplus (overflow) is not in the text in terms of multiple leftover meanings but in what the text effects through its moral instructions, hence respectively in the fact that the text brings about a better person out of the reader, a more wholesome community, and a greater prosperity for humankind.

This differentiation is emphasized because of the fact that only a quantitative approach to the surplus of meaning is pertinent to problem of variant interpretations. The idea of multiple meanings already suggest that each meaning is distinct and unique from other meanings. Thus, a claim that a unit in the Qur'an, such as a verse or a word, contains a surplus of meanings, would in a quantitative framework by default mean that this same unit is able to offer multiple, hence distinct, meanings. Since different meanings ultimately lead to different readings, the inquiry into the question concerning the status of the surplus of meaning within a hermeneutical theory, is without doubt an inquiry into the status of variant interpretations of the Qur'an.

Up to this point we have only described the problem of the surplus of meaning in respect to multiple contemporaneous meanings. Thus, the idea of multiple meanings is still only understood synchronically. However, there is a possibility to relate the problem of the surplus of meaning to the more complex problem of diachrony, and thus, to the idea of the futurity of meaning.

With the futurity of meaning, I simply wish to point towards the fact that a text has the ability to disclose new meanings that were hitherto not known by the text's previous reception history. As I argued previously, the surplus of meaning pertains to the assumption that an element in the Qur'an is able to offer a variety of distinct meanings. However, receiving a *different meaning* from the text, can simultaneously become experienced as receiving a *new meaning* from the text if the experience takes place at a later date under different spatiotemporal circumstances. For example, to stay true to Ricoeur's examples from religious myths, the Fall of Adam might be something one understood literally at Sunday school as a child. At this point, one might simply regard it as a historical/mythological retelling of what happened to humankind's ancestor. However, there is an excess of meaning that can be existentially pertinent in new ways on account of future experiences. For example, as one comes of age, they leave the security of their parental home, thus paradise, and realise that they have to toil for their own survival: "through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life."⁷⁰⁹ Or, perhaps someone commits a crime in their adulthood of such a magnitude that they feel 'stained' by it, having their initial Adamic innocence be lost. As these examples illustrate, Adam's fall takes different meanings on account of future experiences and changing circumstances.

Let me illustrate the relationship between the surplus and futurity of meaning even further with certain hypothetical situations related to interpreting the Qur'an. Let us imagine a situation in which it is believed that the Qur'an is a dynamic message that contains a contingent meaning known by its initial audience as well as an ideal meaning only known by its future audience. Thus, the Qur'an has multiple meanings (surplus of meaning) that can be discovered diachronically (futurity of meaning). Hence, with these assumptions in mind, an interpreter can now address verse 4:3 wherein polygamy is permitted and argue that the aforementioned verse permits polygamy because of contextual constraints but absolves it ultimately by already

⁷⁰⁹ NIV Genesis 3:17

suggesting in between the lines that monogamy is the better option. While the latter meaning might have been dormant in the text (surplus of meaning), only a future audience that is no longer socioeconomically entrenched in the institution of polygamy is capable of intuiting this utopic meaning (futurity of meaning). Similarly, if we were to modify this example by starting from a scientist standpoint, an interpreter could argue that our enlarged understanding of the world through science allows us to read the Qur'an in a way that is informed by modern scientific findings. By implication, such an interpreter could argue that God deposited two meanings into a verse (surplus of meaning): the one that the first audience of the Qur'an could understand, and the meaning that will unveil itself later to a community that is more scientifically adept (futurity of meaning).

It is clear now that the surplus of meaning refers to the phenomenon of being able to infer a variety of meanings from the same text, same verse, or even the same word. Likewise, I have demonstrated that the futurity of meaning pertains to the uncovering of new meanings by present and future audiences. However, to relate these concepts back to the Turkish authors in a simply descriptive manner is not that very interesting. There is nothing inconspicuous about the fact that the Qur'an can be read in different ways either by interpreters living in the same age or by future audiences of the Qur'an. Any serious hermeneutical scholar is aware of this, and so are the Turkish thinkers. Cündioğlu has repeatedly acknowledged that the Qur'an can be read in multiple ways, but only one reading can be authentic to God's intentions. To what degree variant and new interpretations should be constructively appreciated from a hermeneutical standpoint or not, is for the Turkish thinkers a much more important question. Hence, if we are to inquire into the status of the surplus of meaning in the context of the Turkish thinkers, it must be done in relation to the problem of authenticity⁷¹⁰.

⁷¹⁰ That is, relative to their understanding of when subjective/objective interpretations are authentic/inauthentic.

These facts considered, we can already from the outset conclude that in the case of anachronism, the appeal to the surplus and futurity of meaning in the Qur'an is by default objectionable according to the three previously discussed Turkish thinkers. As it was made evident in the previous chapter on language and objectivity, all authors believe that the synchronic nature of language constitutes the objective limits of how language could have been performed during a specific era. Thus, all appeals to the surplus of meaning that is a product of language's later diachrony, is by default suspect and inauthentic to any media expressed during a certain period of a language's history. To reiterate Alpyağıl's example, Woodsworth reference to poets not being gay, can never be interpreted in a way that allows us to claim that Woodsworth meant a sexual orientation, since the reference to sexual orientation only became part of the word after Woodsworth had passed. By extension, to argue that the Qur'an already informed humankind in the 7th century of quantum mechanics, is equally suspect and unconvincing.

Anachronistic readings are by default inauthentic to the text, that much is agreed upon by each author. However, in respect to other circumstances, each author diverges into their own view on the matter. Accordingly, in the following sections I will highlight where these divergences occur and what their further implications are.

The surplus and futurity of meaning in Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics

To start the discussion with Cündioğlu, he advocated a very strict objectivist view on Qur'an hermeneutics. His specific take on the matter, was marked by a claim that utterances are always preceded by a delimited intention. Accordingly, there is only one intention that an interpreter could refer to in order to warrant a certain reading from the Qur'an. Thus, if two different interpretations are offered, one of them has to be wrong in case the other is right, since there can be only one meaning intended by the text. Since, there is no intentional concurrency of different meanings

according to a single utterance in the Qur'an, there is also no intentional surplus of meaning.

This view of meaning concurrency was predominantly based on Cündioğlu's appraisal of polysemy in the Qur'an. As Cündioğlu stated, unlike some outliers such as al-Shāfi'i, the dominant position in classical Islamic hermeneutics either rejected or downplayed the significance of meaning concurrency. Saying one thing while meaning different things simultaneously, was not a conventional practice known to the Arabs, and hence, the Arabic language. Thus, to argue that the Qur'an says one thing, while meaning different things simultaneously, is questionable, because God would have had to employ the Arabic language in ways that were not familiar, and therefore, incomprehensible to the audience of the Qur'an.

Variant interpretations do not occur by God's design in Cündioğlu's framework; they are merely a side-effect of divergences between interpreters in regard to their method and interpretative assumptions, that is their pre-understanding. The more a subject secures the right interpretative assumptions and stays true to the objective material aspects of the text, the less the subject's interpretations will become volatile and prone to divergence and error. Words are uttered or written during a specific period in time, and hence, become actualized in relation to their historical horizon, namely the potential of meanings words can signify during a specific era. For example, a personal pronoun such as "you" (plural) is in its form very abstract and could refer in potential to any group of addressees. Thus, an interpretation that merely regards the form, will inevitably be able to posit an approach that a personal pronoun such as "you" carries such a degree of surplus of meaning that it could refer concurrently to any possible "you" throughout time and space. However, in Cündioğlu's framework, the question is not of possibility but of historical actualization. Thus, the "you" uttered in the Qur'an can only refer to the people that were present during the revelation of a verse. What remains for the

interpreter, is therefore not to look at what a word can possibly signify but what it actually has signified within a historical situation.

Given the reconstructive and objectivist nature of Cündioğlu's hermeneutics, we might be inclined to conclude that there is no futurity to the Qur'an's meanings. However, I would argue that the overall implications Cündioğlu's work still suggest otherwise. It is true that there is no futurity to the Qur'an's meanings, in the sense that God is communicating new messages through the Qur'an, or that the real message of the Qur'an is waiting to be actualized at a more opportune time. Mainly because the event of meaning is restricted by Cündioğlu's framework to the date in which an utterance was actualized: "I [the interpreter] must seek the (correct) meaning not in the future but in the past"⁷¹¹. Nevertheless, there is a futurity involved in our relation to the Qur'an in the sense of recovery. To elucidate, for Cündioğlu, historical distance is not something that makes the subject's relationship to the Qur'an more productive. On the contrary, as Cündioğlu stated: "Meaning has an essence that does not get stronger (*güçlenen*) or become clearer (*belirginleşen*) over time but even gets lost [over time]."⁷¹² Accordingly, to use Cündioğlu's metaphor, what is lost over time, can become recovered again in the future. The meanings known to the Prophet and his audience can become lost in the course of history and then become known again through an archaeology of meaning as if they were new.

Within the reconstructivist paradigm, it is therefore still possible for competing parties to argue over what the Qur'an ultimately signifies. Even to the degree that a future understanding is considered to be better than one held in the past. However, as bold as this implication is, it does have its conditions. First and foremost, given Cündioğlu's recurrent emphasis on historical understanding, it is highly unlikely for anyone to claim by a recourse to Cündioğlu's hermeneutics to understand the

⁷¹¹ C, Book 1, p. 92

⁷¹² C, Book 1, p. 86

Qur'an better than the Prophet and his companions did. The latter were the first addressees, they were the one's God directly spoke to. However, it is possible, as Cündioğlu's work implies, that an interpreter could argue that over time some exegetes missed the mark with certain interpretations because of the deteriorating effects of time on our collective and historical understanding.

Cündioğlu unfortunately does not expand upon the exact technical details of how historical distance deteriorates understanding, or how this unfolds into the ongoing archaeological task of meaning recovery. Perhaps if Cündioğlu had pursued this question with more attention, he would have realised the weaker parts of his own theory. To illustrate this further with Cündioğlu's own principles, meaning can become muddled (or vaporize as Cündioğlu calls it) by the sheer existence of competing narratives concerning the meaning of something. Hence, the surplus of meaning is not something a Muslim should aspire to but try to bar as much as possible. To a degree this is a sensible position, for what does Islam specifically mean if it can mean everything that any random interpreter imagines it to be? That adherents of religions cling to a degree of essentialism by setting boundaries of interpretation is only natural in questions concerning identity. Nevertheless, to argue that the constants of the Qur'an are guaranteed through a reference to historical understanding, is somewhat naïve in light of certain historical facts. For example, if multiple competing understandings of the Qur'an are already prevalent among the companions of the Prophet, how much certitude can the understanding of the companions, that is the surrogates for the historical horizon, provide for capturing the 'the solitary original signification' of the Qur'an?

The fact that a mere recovery of the historical horizon does not offer straightforward answers to what the Qur'an means, can already be witnessed in the multiple interpretative narratives that are attributed to the Prophet's companions or their students. A clear example of this pertains to verse 180:1. In this verse, it is stated that God will give Muhammad *al-kawthar*. However, as the famous exegete

al-Ṭabarī relates, “Interpreters have disagreed on the meaning of *al-kawthar*”⁷¹³. On the one hand there is an opinion going back to ‘Aisha the wife of the Prophet that states that *al-kawthar* refers to a river (*nahr*) in paradise⁷¹⁴. On the other hand, there is an opinion that goes back to Ibn ‘Abbās, the nephew of the Prophet, that describes *al-kawthar* as an abundance of blessing (*al-khayr al-kathīr*). Finally, there is an opinion that goes back to ‘Aṭā’, a student of a companion, that claims that *al-kawthar* is not a river in paradise but a pool (*ḥawḍ*)⁷¹⁵. As excessively scrupulous as it might sound, a river is semantically speaking not equal to a pool, and neither are both of the prior perfectly equivalent to the idea of an abundance of blessing. The latter becomes additionally evident in the fact that some interpreters have argued that the seemingly abstract blessing spoken of refers in actuality to the office of prophecy⁷¹⁶. Thus, we are left with the conclusion that even in the early reception history of the Qur’an, variant readings of the Qur’an had come to exist despite interpreters having a more immediate access to the language of the Qur’an as well as proximity to the Prophet, or in the case of the students, the companions. A historical-critical approach is thus no guarantee for the recovery of an objective meaning that is free of uncertainty.

This is of course not to say that the historical fact of variant interpretations cannot still be mitigated within a reconstructivist approach to the interpretation of the Qur’an, but only that it cannot happen in Cündioğlu’s hermeneutics because of its various blind spots. For example, in the classical Islamic tradition there is also an acknowledgement of the authority which the early generations enjoy for understanding the Qur’an. However, there is also an acknowledgement that the reports that relate to us that understanding are sometimes conflicting. Hence, to resolve this issue certain classical thinkers also integrate a complex source criticism and harmonization into their hermeneutics in order to better arrive at the Qur’an’s

⁷¹³ Ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī: Jām‘ Al-Bayān ‘an-Ta’wīl Āy Al-Qur’ān*, vol. 24 (Cairo: Markaz al-Buḥūth wa-al-Dirasāt al-‘Arabiyya wa-al-Islāmiyya, 2001), 679.

⁷¹⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, 24:680.

⁷¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, 24:685.

⁷¹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, 24:684.

vision for humankind. It is not the proper place to expound upon the minutiae of how this source criticism works, or how divergent reports are harmonized. However, it suffices to say that whereas the classics do take it upon themselves to also address the issue of variant readings stemming from accepted authorities, Cündioğlu's hermeneutical oeuvre lacks another section or book that addresses this issue. As a result, while Cündioğlu has been able to emphasize the importance of his archaeological approach, he has not been able to work out the finer details necessary to this approach.

There is no doubt that some of the earlier discussions will also pertain to an important part of Öztürk's hermeneutics, since Öztürk shares certain fundamental principles with Cündioğlu. For starters, like Cündioğlu, Öztürk also emphasized that any understanding of the Qur'an must first establish the Qur'an's objective historical significance. According to Öztürk it is clear that the Qur'an's message was tailored towards the contingent experiences of a specific historical audience, and therefore, contains elements that are contingent in nature. Ignoring this aspect of the Qur'an in favour of an overestimated universalization of its message, would result according to Öztürk in a variety of unfavourable consequences—the most important of which pertained to the dissonance between one's hermeneutics and one's actual practice. For example, some female interpreters in Turkey acknowledge the institute of polygamy as a transhistorical institute advocated by the Qur'an, since they believe that everything stated in the Qur'an is valid for all ages. Nevertheless, despite this belief, none of these interpreters ever hope to involve themselves in the practice of polygamy. Thus, as Öztürk concludes, such interpreters only pay lip-service to the universalist paradigm, while in reality they already understand that the institute of polygamy has no place in the modern Turkey. Accordingly, a much more earnest approach to the Qur'an would be to fully acknowledge its historicity.

Since the original significance of the Qur'an is located in the past, interpretation is characterized by an act of recovery and reconstruction. This was made clear in reference to Cündioğlu's framework. However, it was also made apparent that under certain circumstances an archaeological of meaning could unfold in an ongoing recovery of new meanings (futuraity of meaning). In other words, when the interpreter believes that historical distance has resulted in the loss of meaning. Thus, the cynicism of meaning loss coupled with an optimism of recovery, results in the utopic promise that a new exegesis of the Qur'an could actually uncover some of the Qur'an's significance that Muslims have lost touch with over the course of history; paradoxically having the old become new again. Given that Öztürk also subscribes to the same principles as described above, including the fact that the course of history has resulted in the disappearance of understanding, his work also shares a similar perspective concerning the futuraity of the Qur'an's meanings akin to that of Cündioğlu. However, unlike Cündioğlu, Öztürk does delve deeper into how meaning becomes lost over history.

The Qur'an is a book that comprises on the one hand meanings that are straightforwardly understood by modern Muslims, while simultaneously also containing elements that are no longer self-evident through historical alienation. Öztürk is very confident that the overall Muslim community, despite its internal conflicts, has a very firm understanding of the basic ethos and rituals of the Qur'an. Accordingly, despite having different political convictions, Sunni and Shia, still agree that the Qur'an commands able-bodied Muslims with fasting during the month of Ramadan. However, at a more particular and technical level, modern day Muslims living in Turkey stand at an undeniable distance from the Qur'an. Neither do Turkish Muslims speak the language of the Qur'an, nor are the finer details of 7th century Arabic experience in the Qur'an familiar to them. Thus, to a certain degree, the Qur'an is both familiar and intelligible, as well as alien and incomprehensible to present-day readers.

In order to mitigate the problem of alienation, a modern Muslims could refer to classical sources in order to better understand the historical context to which the Qur'an belongs, or uncover its meanings as recorded by authorities that are chronologically closest to the Qur'an. However, as Öztürk argues, the biggest problem with classical sources, is the fact that they are liable to manipulation and disinformation (*dezenformasyon*) at the hands of various political, sectarian, and theological interest known to Islamic history. As such, not only did Muslims lose touch with the meaning of the Qur'an on account of the fact that Muslims have culturally outgrown 'the world of the Qur'an', but also because their current understanding of the Qur'an might be based on distorted interpretations that were developed in the course of Islamic history to further ideological agendas.

While Öztürk and Cündioğlu's works agree to this extent, Öztürk's work does have broader implications for the debates concerning the surplus and futurity of meaning that are otherwise missing in Cündioğlu's work. This is predominantly due to the fact that Öztürk maintains a two-step hermeneutics that also constructively relates to the problem of subjectively understanding the Qur'an, which is not present in Cündioğlu's work. As previously discussed, in Öztürk's framework one must remain as objective as possible where the Qur'an's historical significance is considered. However, in respect to the Qur'an's secondary and contemporary significance, interpreters cannot escape from involving their own subjective backgrounds if they are to succeed in properly mediating the Qur'an's message with present-day circumstances. To repeat a recurrent example, the cutting of hands might have been the most apt retribution for a thief given the circumstances and resources of 7th century Arabia. However, in the light of present-day resources and means, a better measure would be to correct a thief through various social services. A better measure not because of our modern sensibilities but in respect to how this measure better realizes the spirit behind God's original injunction, which was to correct the thief and protect the community. As such, besides the optimism of meaning

recovery, in Öztürk's framework there is also a futurity to the meanings of the Qur'an in the possibility of a better application of verses than historically known.

Öztürk based this possibility of new and different implementations of revelation on the notion that the form of a linguistic utterance is not fully commensurate with the intention that was cause for its communication. Hence, to recount another example, God's promise of paradise is not fully commensurate with its concomitant descriptions in the Qur'an. For, as Öztürk argued, these descriptions were tailored to the aesthetic sensibilities of 7th century Arabic men and women. Rather, the essence of the meaning of paradise resides in the fact that it is the place where all subjective dreams become realized. Thus, the significance of paradise is not exhausted by its contingent descriptions in the Qur'an but by the imagination of its readership in the present and the unknown future. Yet, despite this open-ended possibility of reading the Qur'an in new ways, this is not to say that Öztürk acknowledges the possibility that God intended different things simultaneously. On the contrary, all elements of Öztürk's work hint towards the fact that God has communicated a single transcendent intention that humans subsequently relate to their particular situation in new and imaginative ways without straying away from the essence of God's message.

There is nothing in Öztürk's work that lends credence to the belief that God is purporting multiple different things with his Qur'an. In this sense there is an overlap between the ideas of Öztürk and Cündioğlu, since both authors do not advocate a hermeneutics that assumes that God intended different things simultaneously. Variance, as we saw earlier, is in Öztürk's framework not in the intention behind verses but in their implementation. In a sense this is very logical, for if Öztürk had argued that variance could be retraced to God's intention while maintaining that God's intention is the universal constant behind verses, then Öztürk would have to account for the possibility that God's ultimate wish is for humankind to prosper and not prosper, for a thief to be corrected and not to be corrected. This, however,

would mean that God would contradict Himself. Accordingly, in Öztürk's framework variant readings can never be justified with the argument that God willed different things, only by arguing that new contexts can result in new subjective implementations of God's solitary intention.

Despite acknowledging the universal higher objectives behind God's contingently formulated message, there is also an undercurrent in Öztürk's work that specifically argues that certain verses of the Qur'an do not have any futurity to their meaning. Some verses of the Qur'an are simply responding to contingent historical events, and only have a meaning for that moment. There is no higher ethical message to be inferred from such verses in order to enable them to be pertinent in renewed circumstances. A clear example of this were some of the stories within the Qur'an that were only narrated to satisfy certain curiosities that Muhammad's detractors had. In other words, these narrations were ad-hoc responses, and are not the kind of verses that harbour a transcendent message that can be discovered over and over again by new subjectivities.

In Alpyağıl's framework, on the other hand, there are yet again similar and different consequences to be discovered for the surplus and futurity of meaning in the Qur'an. There is no doubt that Alpyağıl shares similar ideas to that of Öztürk and Cündioğlu. For example, similar to the other authors, Alpyağıl also accorded an important hermeneutical place to the intersubjective dimensions of language. In Alpyağıl's framework, private language is impossible. Thus, to claim that one interprets certain words by virtue of his or her own private insights, is similar to the claim that one can take any given word and ascribe to it a random meaning. Since the latter was proven to be impossible and nonsensical within the hypothetical discussion of private language use, it means that any interpretation that does not respect previously established conventions of language, is likewise nonsensical. Thus, comparable to the other authors, we can already argue from Alpyağıl's perspective that any appeal to a surplus of meanings in the Qur'an that was not

historically known or possible within the constraints of a language, is already from the onset suspect and inadmissible. However, unlike Cüendioğlu, Alpyağıl does maintain a view of objectivity that is not statically fixed in the past and is able to change over time. Likewise, in contrast to Öztürk, Alpyağıl questions whether there is not more futurity to the otherwise contingent historical meanings of the Qur'an.

While it is true that rules ought to be followed, it is also true in Alpyağıl's eyes that rules cannot be followed without being interpreted. Alpyağıl demonstrated this with a very straightforward example from the Qur'an. To recall, in verse 25:67 the addressees of the Qur'an are told that the servants of God are neither extravagant nor stingy. However, what constitutes extravagance or stinginess is ultimately something that is relative to a certain context. What might have constituted an extravagant spending in one situation, could well be a sign of stinginess in another context. Moreover, despite Alpyağıl not having presented this example, it is not difficult to envision how the most modest breakfast in Western Europe today could be regarded by medieval standards to be lavish, simply on account of the progress in food security. Hence, as Alpyağıl demonstrated, renewed contexts can lead to renewed explanations of certain verses.

There is thus an immediate contrast to be encountered between Alpyağıl and Cüendioğlu in regard to variant explanations of the same word in the Qur'an. For Cüendioğlu, renewed readings cannot measure their validity against present-day understanding. However, in Alpyağıl's view, words such as extravagance, should be interpreted according to present-day conventions if we are to properly apply them in contemporary situations. Accordingly, there is a double commitment to be discovered in Alpyağıl's thinking that is loyal to both the subjective and objective meaning of the Qur'an. Loyal to the subjective meaning, because every context demands a different reading if the Qur'an is to be properly interpreted in a certain age. Conversely, loyal to the objective meaning, because the subjective interpretation should ultimately be approved by the greater community.

It is this latter fact, that differentiates Alpyağıl also from Öztürk in respect to the problem of variant readings. While Alpyağıl and Öztürk both acknowledge how the implementation of verses can change over time, it is only Alpyağıl that explicitly argues that this implementation must also be acknowledged by the greater community. In Öztürk's work there is only an explicit emphasis on the fact that the reconstruction of the Qur'an's historical significance must objectively justified. The Qur'an's subsequent significance is not put to the stringent condition that it must be acknowledged by the greater community of Muslims. The only real condition that can be surmised from Öztürk's work, is the fact that new implementations of certain verses should not contradict what is believed to be the higher objectives of these verses. Given that the letter follows the spirit of the law, so should also the application of the law.

The difference between Öztürk and Alpyağıl's ideas becomes further noticeable in regard to the problem of higher objectives and the Qur'an. Before I elaborate further on this difference, I wish to shed a little light on the notion itself, since Alpyağıl and Öztürk already assume their readers to be familiar with the background of the concept. Such an assumption is not that surprising, since anyone that is familiar with modern Islamic discourse, will inevitably have observed the rise and proliferation of the literature on the higher objectives of Islamic Law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'a*). This traditional concept, as its name suggests, focuses on the essence of Islamic Law in terms of its abstract higher objectives, rather than its particulars. Put more crudely, it focuses on what the spirit of the law is, rather than its letter.

Given its current prominence, various attempts have been made by reformist and non-reformist researchers into uncovering the historicity of the concept in traditional Islamic discourse. Partly out of a genealogical interest but also because of the weight that traditional concepts carry for a conventional Muslim audience. Reform without traditional authority is inevitably a challenging task. Hence, if a

recourse to the higher objectives of Islamic Law were to be something practiced and approved by traditional authorities, then reformists would inevitably have an easier task of convincing their audience of the legitimacy of their own appeal to these higher objectives. Accordingly, anyone studying this concept will discover that different historicities have been accorded to the concept, retracing it back to various important stages of Islamic history, such as the eponymous founders of the legal schools in Islam or the companions of the Prophet. However, in order to introduce the concept, I will refer only to one interpretation of the concept, that is as outlined by the 14th century Andalusian scholar al-Shāṭibī (d. 1388). Mainly because of the dominant presence of al-Shāṭibī's ideas in contemporary discussions concerning the subject matter and his influence on different modernist thinkers.

Al-Shāṭibī surely did not advance the idea of higher objectives with modernist scruples in mind. Rather, the concept of higher objectives was introduced in relation to the problem of whether God's actions have a rationally definable cause (*ta'īl*). Unlike his predecessor al-Rāzī (d. 1210), al-Shāṭibī did believe that humans are capable of discerning the reasons behind God's actions⁷¹⁷. While we might not come to this hermeneutical principle from an explicit mention of the text, according to al-Shāṭibī we can infer (*istiqrā'*) this from a holistic reading of a greater body of verses. In other words, by recurrently making note of the fact that God Himself mentions in verses that there is a specific preponderance involved in His request or report. For example, in verse 20:14 it is stated that the prayer should be maintained *in order* to remember God. Another example is verse 4:165, wherein the sending of messengers is unequivocally related to a clear rationale: "that humankind, after (the coming) of the messengers, should have no plea against Allah."⁷¹⁸ Thus, for al-Shāṭibī, not only are there clear reasons for why God requests or reports something, but He also explicitly mentions these reasons in His Qur'an⁷¹⁹.

⁷¹⁷ Abū Ishāq Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt Fī Uṣūl Al-Sharī'a*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1997), 322.

⁷¹⁸ Qur'an 4:165

⁷¹⁹ Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt Fī Uṣūl Al-Sharī'a*, 2:323.

After establishing this hermeneutical fact that God's law has a rationale behind it that is intelligible to human subjects, al-Shāṭibī further ventures forward into constructing a comprehensive hierarchical framework wherewith the *sharī'a* is appreciated. At the very heart of the *sharī'a*, as al-Shāṭibī argues, resides the ultimate objective of aiding subjects in procuring well-being (*maṣlaḥa*) in the present and the hereafter⁷²⁰. Accordingly, to realize this greater purpose, the *sharī'a* is structured around a tripartite framework: there are the elements of the *sharī'a* that pertain to the necessities (*ḍarūriyāt*), those who pertain to exigencies (*ḥājjiyāt*), and those who pertain to enhancements (*taḥsīniyāt*)⁷²¹. Thus, any injunction that protects life belongs to the necessities, since protecting life is one of the absolute aims of the *sharī'a*. However, when something is urgent, without being absolutely necessary, it belongs to the category of exigencies. An example of this pertains to the abatement of fasting when one is ill: "But if any of you is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed number (Should be made up) from days later"⁷²². Finally, there are the elements of the *sharī'a* that only improve quality of life but are neither necessary nor urgent within a given situation; Islamic rules on personal hygiene are a clear example of this.

It is with the question of which items belong to the category of necessities that the theory of higher objectives and the problem of subjectivity start to intersect. According to al-Shāṭibī, the most primary aims of the *sharī'a* revolve around the following five necessities: protection of life, progeny, religion, intellect, and property. One could even discover these aims, argues al-Shāṭibī, in other religions. Nevertheless, despite their perennial and obvious nature, other contemporaries of al-Shāṭibī, such as al-Ṭūfī (d. 1316) and al-Subkī (d. 1355) have both added a sixth item to the list that al-Shāṭibī did not include. The item in question pertains to honour, and as al-Qahtani relates, "They [i.e. al-Ṭūfī and al-Subkī] argued that sensible people would often be willing to sacrifice their lives and wealth in defense

⁷²⁰ Al-Shāṭibī, 2:322.

⁷²¹ Al-Shāṭibī, 2:324.

⁷²² Qur'an 2:184

of their honor.”⁷²³ Thus, as this example shows, one could argue that honour is more essential than life, because there have been men and women who have given up their lives and wealth in defence of their honour and should therefore also belong to the list of necessities. However, does this not also hint at the fact that what is defined as a necessity is based on subjective circumstances and estimations? For, we can easily imagine the inverse of the earlier argument: while it might hold true in some parts of the Middle East that honour is more important than life, one would be hard-pressed to argue that the average Dutchman, for example, would kill or die over honour. Accordingly, can we put questions marks, as Alpyağıl does, by wondering whether the so-called objective higher aims of God are in reality the interpreter’s own subjective projections on the text?

Some concepts cannot escape from being involved in certain value hierarchies. The universal is often regarded in higher esteem than the particular, and the spirit or essence of something is usually deemed to be more valuable than its form. Accordingly, when Öztürk develops the binaries of the universal transhistorical elements of the Qur’an vis-à-vis the contingent particular elements, he inevitably also creates a certain hierarchy. This hierarchy, as it was recurrently emphasized, favours the purpose behind a verse, i.e. the higher objective, over the specific form in which a verse was delivered. However, Alpyağıl suspects that such hierarchies are not derived from the text but are the consequence of a modernist appreciation of past cultures.

An optimistic appreciation of modernity inevitably assumes that certain changes in the modern world are a sign of progress. Hence, as Alpyağıl argued, any interpreter that reads a text that belongs to a past perceived as less developed, will by default hold the text accountable to the more elevated standards of the present. Bifurcations into contingent injunctions vis-à-vis universal higher objectives, are

⁷²³ Musfir bin Ali Al-Qahtani, *Understanding Maqasid Al-Shari’ah: A Contemporary Perspective* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2015), 18.

according to Alpyağıl a disguised way in which the modernist interpreter deals with the dissonance between the values of the present and those espoused by a historical text such as the Qur'an. Accordingly, historicists create dualities such as ideal-contingent, historical-transhistorical, and universal-particular, in order to still acknowledge the Qur'an in some capacity, while ignoring other aspects of its text. In other words, while the higher aims of the *sharī'a* still have a place in the modern world, since they are too abstract to conflict, and are therefore, acknowledged as objective and universal; the particular implementation of the *sharī'a* is regarded to conflict with modern norms and values, and hence, is considered to be historical and out of place.

Alpyağıl, as we had discovered in a previous chapter, challenges this notion by arguing firstly that we should not value the meaning of verses according to a progression bias but according to whether these verses are context appropriate. For example, in verse 8:60 it is argued that believers should prepare for combat by readying "steeds of war". It is not hard to see that Qur'an historicist would argue that such verses were meaningful only in their own times, since by the standard of modern warfare and artillery, war horses are very much an outdated choice when one is able to employ tanks or fighter jets. However, as Alpyağıl argued, while this advice might feel out of place in present-day United States, it is undoubtedly relevant, or maybe even necessary, in some parts of the world, such as Afghanistan. Accordingly, verses must be appreciated according to the situation, and not in light of the modernist bias and belief in progression.

Besides, rather than arguing for a model in which the present values are leading, Alpyağıl would like to advocate an approach that is best described in terms of a fusion of horizons. An interpreter should not discard the historical elements of the Qur'an because they feel alien or outdated relative to his present-day situation but should attempt at drawing parallels with their own context. A modern Turkish reader and an ancient Arabic text have different horizons of meaning. For example,

the concept of 'camel' is realised differently within the cultural horizon of 7th century Arabia vis-à-vis present-day Turkey. While in the prior the camel is seen as an important part of their cultural and biological ecosystem, in the latter instance a camel might be a simple novelty animal observed in a zoo. Accordingly, to still understand a camel for what it is in the context of meaning that belongs to the Qur'an, a Turkish reader would have to find its analogue in his or her own cultural context.

The notion of finding analogues in new contexts, was also argued by Öztürk. However, what is of note, is how distinctly similar the hermeneutical premises are shared by both authors. For starters, both Alpyağıl and Öztürk argued that the Qur'an is not a book that has provided every particular solution to all kinds of imaginable human problems. On the contrary, the Qur'an has specifically only addressed a limited set of issues with a specific set of solutions. Moreover, when the Qur'an offers a solution, the Qur'an does so as an example of how the problem should be solved, and not to say that this is the only solution to all kinds of different situations. The idea that the Qur'an only provides an example and not the only possible way to address an issue was argued by Öztürk in reference to his claim that a linguistic form is not commensurate with the intent of an utterance. However, Alpyağıl argues this in a less refined manner by stating that the provisional nature of solutions should be read between the lines of the Qur'an: "If the expression is not out of place, the Qur'an is a book that says "for example" between the lines (*söz arasında*)."⁷²⁴ Hence, when we return to the problem of preparing horses for war in the modern world, Alpyağıl's response would be to not only have an open mind about how such a verse could become relevant in other situations but also, when it is not relevant, to consider it in didactic terms. In other words, as Alpyağıl's argument suggests, as a starting point to understand that in war one ought to prepare the best of military resources, which respectively meant in 7th century Arabia a horse and presently a tank.

⁷²⁴ WHWH, p. 158

On the other hand, Alpyağıl does acknowledge similar to Öztürk that not all verses in the Qur'an are relevant. For example, verse 33:6 argues that the Prophet's wives are the mothers of believers. Indirectly this meant that Muslims could not marry the Prophet's wives. Accordingly, it is only natural that some Muslims might ask to what degree such verses have any futurity to them when the Prophet's wives have long deceased? A similar case could also be made concerning miracles. The verses that report on the various miracles of prophets, is hardly something that could be transposed through analogical situations or the fusion of horizons into present-day experiences. However, in such cases Alpyağıl hopes that these verses are appreciated by either considering them as matters of faith or part of the overall narrative identity of Muslims. Such verses might not be reenactable in the present, but they are part of the historical cultural consciousness of Islam: prophets did come with miracles, and Muhammad's wives were in status considered as mothers to the believers.

Despite this substantial hermeneutical claim that the Qur'an provides examples and not absolute solutions, neither Öztürk nor Alpyağıl directly address the implications that their theories have for the futurity of meaning in the Qur'an. To a degree this could be explained by the often-discussed dichotomy between hermeneutics and exegesis. Accordingly, it is unfair to expect a fully-fledged exegesis of the Qur'an when the question is not about what the Qur'an says but how our human capacity to understand relates to the interpretation of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, even in the scope of theory, one might expect some of the practical consequences of the theory to be part of its exposition. Especially when these practical consequences are so immediate to any reader of Alpyağıl and Öztürk's theories. Hence, it seems highly unlikely that the architects of these theories could not think themselves of these implications, unless we are willing to ascribe this to a lack of foresight, or the fact that some conclusions were left equivocal on account of how delicate their nature

is. Regardless, the fact remains that some pertinent questions are still to be successfully answered by either of the authors.

To start with the first question, Alpyağıl argued that different contexts could still make certain practices in the Qur'an become meaningful, or even necessary for that matter. However, as crass and rhetorical as this might sound, does it mean that there are actually different, and maybe even, future contexts possible where men are allowed to have extramarital intercourse with female slaves? For if we are to read the Qur'an, we discover that it states that believing men may only have intercourse with "those joined to them in the marriage bond, or (the captives) whom their right hands possess."⁷²⁵ Accordingly, we can wonder if this mean that there are still contexts possible wherein men may have slaves, and where - by extension - the institute of slavery could become effective? If we are to strictly apply the earlier example of how the preparation of horses for war might be irrelevant for an American infantry but still relevant for an Afghan infantry, we have to assume that a similar scenario might also be possible for the practice of having extramarital intercourse with female slaves.

On the other hand, Alpyağıl could argue that in regard to the problem of slavery that one must not attempt at understanding the Qur'an in its historical immediacy through our modernist biases but through an empathetic attempt at fusing the different horizons that the present-day interpreter and the past text belong to. However, in such a case we would have to find analogues for 7th century slavery in our contemporary experiences in order to better understand the verse in its own context as well as how it relates to our situation. Accordingly, we know that the Qur'an acknowledges the existence of slaves. However, we also know that the manumission of slaves was advocated by the Qur'an, since righteousness is described as the spending of one's substance "for orphans, for the needy, for the

⁷²⁵ Qur'an 23:6

wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves”⁷²⁶. However, given these facts, can an interpreter then go as far as to read the Qur’an in such a way that he or she firstly draws an analogy between 7th century slaves and present-day exploited low-wage workers, followed by regarding the improvement of ill-fated working conditions akin to the act of manumission? Alpyağıl’s work seems to also suggest this outcome; however, he is not clear about what the exact parameters or limits of his analogical approach is.

A similar critique could also be voiced toward Öztürk. Especially given the fact that Öztürk does believe that the aims of the Qur’an can be better implemented in future circumstances. Accordingly, with this perspective in mind, we can read the Qur’an and discover the following verse: “O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested.”⁷²⁷ Now, it is not difficult to infer the ultimate intent behind the injunction of the Islamic dress code for women, since the verse clearly states “that they should be known (as such) and not molested”. Consequently, is it possible – given Öztürk’s belief in the possibility of better implementation – that women who have found better ways in which they could protect themselves from molestation to actually forego the classical Islamic dress code? Öztürk’s work implies such a reading. This can easily be deduced from the example of the cutting of hands, as Öztürk argued that a better modern solution to the correction of a thief would be through social services. However, while Öztürk’s work suggests such a possibility, it is never thematically developed further.

⁷²⁶ Qur’an 2:177

⁷²⁷ Qur’an 33:59

Conclusion

If we are to sum up the earlier discussions concerning the status of variant readings in contemporary Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey, we would have to start with the assessment that these theories maintain an outlook that is both insulated and paradoxically very porous. Thus, while there is a strong element in these theories that seeks to limit the way in which the Qur'an is read differently than its previous reception history, there is simultaneously – in some ways an unintended – element of opening up avenues for reading the Qur'an in different ways than previously known by tradition. However, given the fact that the authors have not addressed the preliminary implications of their theories, there is also an element of incompleteness to be discovered in their theories.

In regard to the insulated dimension of these theories, it is clear that anachronistic readings of the Qur'an are by default rejected by all three authors. To put it differently, an interpreter that circumvents the Qur'an's original reception history in order to argue an understanding of the Qur'an that is entrenched in modern frames of references, is by default implicating themselves in a hermeneutically illegitimate reading of the Qur'an. Thus, for example, one cannot entertain the idea that the Qur'an is a revelation that contains in the depths of its texture an exhibition on quantum mechanical theory. Likewise, to argue that the Qur'an spoke not of slaves as bondsmen but of employees, is similarly out of place.

Yet, despite attempts to limit the ways in which the Qur'an is read by modernist ideological frames of references, such as scientific positivism or reformism, there is also an explicit and implicit opening up of other ways wherein the Qur'an can be read in different and new ways. In Cündioğlu's framework it is possible to read the Qur'an differently as long as one is able to justify that their reading rather than that of tradition goes back to God's sole, objective intention. Likewise, in Alpyağıl's view it is possible to read the Qur'an differently, since the meaning of words such as

miserliness can change over time. Moreover, one can read the Qur'an heuristically, followed by a need to find contemporary analogues to the examples presented by the Qur'an. Finally, in Öztürk's view one can relate the higher intent behind verses in better ways to contemporary situations than how these verses have been historically implemented.

There is without doubt a lot of potential to be discovered in contemporary Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey for new ways in which the Qur'an can be read. However, it is only a potential whose rough edges have to still be worked out and whose implications have to be further drawn out. Cündioğlu emphasized the historical-critical method but did not address the finer inconsistencies of this method, such as the lack of theoretical handles wherewith the disparity in historical data can be tackled. Likewise, Alpyağıl argued that meaning can be recovered analogically in the present, but what are the limits of these analogies? Can slavery be analogically understood, or even more so, implemented in the present? Finally, what are the limits of implementing the Qur'an in better ways in the present, as Öztürk argued? Does this mean that one can alter the Islamic dress code, or for that matter, other rituals of the Qur'an? Despite their urgency, all of these questions, are as far as the data points out, remain to be answered by the Turkish thinkers.

Final reflections on the state of Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey

In the following sections, I wish to conclude this dissertation with final reflections on the state of Qur'an hermeneutics in Turkey as gathered from previous chapters. I will present and compare these reflections with the findings and conclusions drawn in two other seminal studies in this field. These studies are respectively Körner's *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology: Rethinking Islam* and Wilkinson's *Dialectical Encounters: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue*.

Among his final remarks, Körner compared Turkish thought to a thriving young jungle without much "bio-diversity". For, as Körner concluded, the Turkish authors restricted themselves to only one type of question: ethics. In other words, to the question as to how the Qur'an can be made ethically acceptable again. However, this focus stifled Qur'an hermeneutics in two ways. First, it made hermeneutics only serve a mechanical function, for "we know what is there in the Koran, ethics; and we know what must come out, modern ethics. The only question left is, how do we get it out? Hermeneutics has [hence] become a tin-opener."⁷²⁸ Second, since the focus of Turkish hermeneutics is to prove that the "Koran can keep up", it put Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics at risk of "producing nothing but apologetics"⁷²⁹.

Having related Körner's findings to this dissertation, I agree with the fact that Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics is indeed a young jungle. However, in respect to the discourse studied in this dissertation, I have come to find the works of these Turkish thinkers to be more diverse and more compelling than being a simple tin-opener or apologetic defence of the Qur'an's relevance in modernity. Unlike Körner who only studied modernist, university theology and the works of the Ankara School, I had

⁷²⁸ Körner, "Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology : Rethinking Islam," 204.

⁷²⁹ Körner, 204.

made a case in the introduction chapter to study also historicist (*tarihselci*) discourse not belonging to the Ankara School (Öztürk), university theology (*ilahiyat*) outside of Ankara (Alpyağıl), and non-university, research (*araştırma yazarci*) discourse (Cündioğlu). This accordingly resulted in discoveries that present a different picture of Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics from the one depicted by Körner. A picture in which we can see that the authors actively deprioritize or even reject the instrumentalization of hermeneutics in order to make the Qur'an more palatable for modern sensibilities.

Alpyağıl, Cündioğlu and Öztürk have each made a hermeneutical case for the appreciation of the Qur'an with its historical particularity, even if that particularity goes against the grain of contemporary sentiments. Their hermeneutics were rooted in the motivation to respond to excesses in contemporary Qur'an studies. For Öztürk one of these excesses is the over universalizing of the Qur'an's address. As such, Öztürk made an explicit case to argue that some verses were simply particular to a historical context, and should not be forced to instil a transcendental, universal ethics. Likewise, Cündioğlu explicitly argued against interpretations that abused the polysemy of Arabic in order to apologetically advance new, politically correct readings of the Qur'an. Finally, Alpyağıl suspected historicist readings of being an underhanded attempt at disqualifying the Qur'an's norms and values in favour of those espoused by modernity. Accordingly, Alpyağıl provided a counter hermeneutics that did not read the Qur'an in supersessionist and apologetic terms but in an intercultural and cyclical way. Preparing horses for war was indeed historically relevant, but that does not exclude – even if we now have tanks at our disposal – that there are not still cultures for whom this message is pertinent, or that we might enter a future wherein it can also become relevant again for developed countries. Accordingly, Alpyağıl's hermeneutics does not even wish to be apologetical by either historicizing verses to only be relevant to the past. Neither does he wish to read these verses in alternate ways so that they do agree with modern norms and values. Our particular present is for Alpyağıl simply not the

ultimate reference or sole proprietor of the definition of wisdom and meaning that the Qur'an can offer.

Körner was also disappointed by the limited ambitions of the Turkish thinkers. As Körner recalls, "But how can one study Koran hermeneutics, and then complain that what one has found is only hermeneutics?"⁷³⁰ For Körner the answer to this question resides in the ambiguity of the term hermeneutics: "here, one should be reminded of the ambiguity of the word 'hermeneutics'."⁷³¹ In Körner's work, hermeneutics does not only pertain to the theory of interpretations but also actual interpretation. Since the latter is underdeveloped in the works of the Turkish thinkers, it follows that Körner is still hopeful that the Turkish "theological workshop" will one day produce "an even more theological Islam, which casts new light on our questions, visions and lives."⁷³²

In this dissertation I had specifically redirected and tempered such an expectation by explicitly divorcing hermeneutics from interpretation. In the second chapter I had made a case that hermeneutics is a contemplation on the operations and conditions in which the meanings of things become intelligible, expressed at its lowest threshold in a statement. I made this separation on account of the genealogy of Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics. Turkish Qur'an hermeneutics has been in the last few decades a response to a sprawl of perceived arbitrary interpretations of the Qur'an. Hence it is by its very nature a meta-level critique and pedagogy on how the Qur'an should be read. Its starting point, as I had demonstrated up to the fifth chapter, is to insulate the Qur'an from being read freely by stipulating subjective and objective requirements. Its ambition is fundamentally philosophical, and less exegetical. If there is any exegesis, it is only to drive a theoretical point forward.

⁷³⁰ Körner, 205.

⁷³¹ Körner, 205.

⁷³² Körner, 205.

Turkish thought remains fundamentally theoretical but also dialectical. This latter aspect was extensively assessed by Wilkinson. Wilkinson argued that Turkish thought is at its most creative a dialectical enterprise that seeks to navigate at certain times western sources with the help of Turkish and Arabic ones, and other times Turkish or Arabic discussions with the aid of Western sources⁷³³. In this dissertation, I have only come to further vindicate this claim. For example, Cündioğlu employed Saussurean and Chomskyan concepts in order to navigate the classical discussion on the status of the *lafz-i müsterek* (polysemic expressions) in the Qur'an. Conversely, Öztürk came to the defence of Dilthey by arguing that the psychologization of God's will was possible despite ontological difference. His evidence was the *muvaafakat-i Ömer*, that is the recurrent historical occurrence wherein the Prophet's companion 'Umar had voiced an opinion on a matter that subsequently was reiterated, and thereby vindicated, by revelation. With this concept Öztürk demonstrated that the argument of ontological difference cannot be held as a hermeneutical principle, since history proved that God and humans have a shared reason⁷³⁴.

This dialectical engagement is however not always as constructive or deep. In the words of Wilkinson, "The [dialectical] responses vary and include negative, positive, and constructive elements; they include clichés, generalizations, critical insights, and points of active dialogue."⁷³⁵ Indeed, the cross-cultural dialectics inherent in Turkish thinkers can deeply vary from Alpyağıl's very dense engagement with Wittgensteinian thought to Öztürk's simple citation of Heidegger that language is the home of being. However, while Turkish theology is learning a lot from western philosophical discourse, the question remains as to whether western philosophical

⁷³³ Wilkinson, *Dialectical Encounters: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue*, 227.

⁷³⁴ 'Umar's suggestions were based on rational deliberations. By becoming vindicated in the Qur'an, the rationality behind these suggestions becomes also accepted by God. However, by implication, it is hard to think that God accepts the rationality of a rule or solution suggested by 'Umar when God Himself has not rationalized the rule itself. If God has indeed rationalized and come to the same conclusion that a rule is appropriate for a given context, that means that man and God – despite being ontologically different - share to a certain degree the same type of reason.

⁷³⁵ Wilkinson, *Dialectical Encounters: Contemporary Turkish Muslim Thought in Dialogue*, 227.

discourse can learn something from Turkish theology's appropriation of some of its ideas? The answer to this seems to be more inclined towards vindication and less towards evolution. In other words, the creative appropriation of the Turkish thinkers, which itself relies on imaginative arguments, becomes a corpus that vindicates and puts certain western ideas into practice. However, because it focuses more on using these ideas to drive its own points forward, it does little to evolve the western discourse itself from which these ideas are borrowed.

Ultimately it is not so much the purely theoretical nature of Turkish hermeneutics or the weaker aspects of its dialectics that I hold the most critically accountable but its theoretical open-endedness. As Wilkinson states, "Turkish theologians range in a continuum from taking on more prescriptive roles to more explorative roles."⁷³⁶ Hence, if I relate this statement to this dissertation, we had similarly discovered the prescriptive elements of Turkish thought in the delineation of objective and subjective requirements needed to interpret the Qur'an. However, in order to delineate these requirements, the Turkish authors were also philosophically exploring the problems of objectivity and subjectivity. Whilst exploring these problems some authors organically came into certain conclusions that have critical consequences for the future of new readings of the Qur'an. However, the full philosophical implications, despite some authors intuiting these implications⁷³⁷, was only left implied, and the answer often deferred to the future. For example, Öztürk extended *ta'wīl* to jurisprudence and theology. This brought forth the notion that renewed subjective mediations could potentially produce new, more contemporary metaphors of God and better applications of the injunctions of the Qur'an. However, the exact extent and limitations of what could be done better was left ambiguous: something the interpreter had to figure out in good conscious. Can we, for example, find better means to be chaste and protected from harassment than by wearing a head scarf? Can we revitalize the Judeo-Christian metaphor of God as

⁷³⁶ Wilkinson, 235.

⁷³⁷ The Turkish authors knew that they had drawn conclusions with heavy implications. However, they would immediately resort to certain rhetoric that would defer the question.

father again within Islam that is wholly compliant with Islam's strict monotheism? None of these questions that truly test the limits of the theories posed, are explored by Öztürk himself. Likewise, Alpyağıl argued that historical implementations of the Qur'an could become meaningful again in the future. However, does this really mean that we can imagine a future wherein slavery becomes relevant again? Alpyağıl who was aware of such questions, followed Öztürk by also choosing to defer the answer to such controversial questions to the prudence of the future interpreter.

I assume that this reticence has only to do with the conservative sensibilities of some of the readers in Turkey. In 2020 Öztürk was relieved from his post as researcher at the Kur'an Araştırmaları Merkezi (Centre for Qur'an Studies/Research) due to certain complaints about the controversial nature of Öztürk's statements. Nevertheless, the fact remains that certain answers that were deferred by the Turkish authors must still be sought in subsequent works by these thinkers or by newer generations. Accordingly, the Turkish authors have laid the foundations and created a futurity for Qur'an hermeneutics that is still in wait for the answers they have deferred.

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